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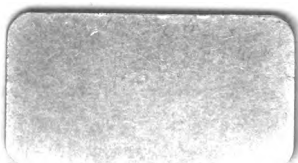
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ON THE
STATE OF MAN SUBSEQUENT
TO THE PROMULGATION
OF CHRISTIANITY.



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for

Era Abbot

May, 1871.

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Small Books on Great Subjects.

EDITED BY A FEW WELL WISHERS
TO KNOWLEDGE.



Nº. XIX.



ON THE
STATE OF MAN SUBSEQUENT
TO THE PROMULGATION
OF CHRISTIANITY.

By Caroline Frances Cornwallis
✠

SECOND EDITION. *1st ed. 1851.*



LONDON:
JOHN W. PARKER AND SON, WEST STRAND.
1854.

LONDON :
SAVILL AND EDWARDS, PRINTERS,
CHANDOS STREET.

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C8210
1851
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ADVERTISEMENT TO THE SECOND EDITION.

WHEN the Fourth Part of this work went to press, the author expressed an intention of giving a concluding Part in 1854, but while that announcement was yet wet from the press, the bankruptcy of the publisher so far deranged the whole of the affairs relating to the series of *Small Books on Great Subjects* that it was not thought prudent to enter into farther engagements till the business was arranged. Even the publication of the Part already printed was delayed, in consequence, during several months. This, of course, has caused a corresponding delay in the preparation of the concluding Part ; and at this moment, when every hour is big with events which may change the whole prospects of the world, the Author may well pause to collect his thoughts ere he presumes to give an opinion on the state of things at present.

The contest which is now begun, is not, as in former times, a mere war between different nations contending for separate interests: it is,—disguise the matter as we may,—the death struggle between civilisation and barbarism; between the free human mind and those who wish to fetter it: and however political interests may complicate the matters at issue, every year will tend still more to show what is the real object of this war. Man was not created to remain for ever a mere animal, drudging from youth to age to procure luxuries for a few: it may be, nay, probably is, a necessary phase of the transition from the animal to the intellectual being: but none who have gone along with the writer over the ages which have elapsed since the promulgation of Christianity can doubt that the earth has a brighter future in preparation—that science has yet a great work to do, not merely for the few, but for the many—that, in short, such a future is in the order of Providence, and that the nations alone which walk in this appointed path will ultimately retain their place in the vanguard of mankind.

Thus much it is easy to any thinking mind to perceive, but what place England is here-

after to take';—whether it will nobly persevere in correcting the faults of its own internal administration and social system, while engaged in external war, or whether, like other great commercial nations of former times, its very greatness will become its ruin, by generating an eagerness for gain which will undermine the national probity, and destroy the people by their own vices;—that is as yet a problem of difficult solution, and one which the Author must beg a little longer time to consider. Nevertheless, if God grant time, the promise shall be kept; and whether England be going forward or backward, the readers of the *Small Books* shall at least have the Author's opinion on the subject of the true road to national greatness. No nation of Christendom has ever yet completely carried out the Christian system in its internal government: no legislator has ever yet completely recognised what that system requires; for attempts to enforce morality and religion by penalty and statute certainly show a very great misapprehension of the philosophy taught by the Founder of our faith, by which we should learn that the motive, and not the overt act, is the matter to be considered. In

this the law of God and man differ as widely as the nature of the two judges ; for man, who cannot read the heart, judges by the overt act, and frames his laws accordingly ; but these laws are frequently found to be ineffectual :—God, on the contrary, who can read the motive, has regard to that only, sure that if the motive be a right one the action can only be wrong through the mistakes incident to a finite creature, and will soon be corrected by experience. The human legislator can never entirely avoid the difficulties which his own finite nature throws in his way ; but if he can never attain to a full knowledge of motives, and must still judge, when he awards punishment, by the overt acts committed, still he may at least endeavour to influence the motives rather than the actions of mankind. Fear is one of the basest of passions, and as long as there are nobler incitements to action than this, it is as unwise as it is wrong to depend upon it. The nation which means to be great must honour noble actions, not merely punish crime : must inspire the young with a hatred of vice, rather than endeavour to deter adults from pursuing the evil paths they have already entered, by the mere fear of

pains and penalties. We break in our colts, and we train our dogs :—what have we done for the young of our own species? The answers to the questions which this one inquiry suggests, form, or should form, the foundation of all legislation : and the nation which solves these questions the most completely and practically, will take its place, and deservedly so, as the leader of the world ; but WHERE IS THE NATION TO BE FOUND WHICH CAN GIVE A SATISFACTORY REPLY ?





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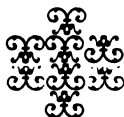
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CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE.

Year of Rome.	B. C.	
750	5	ACCORDING to the best calculations Jesus Christ was born in this year; the era still used is calculated from a somewhat later period.
	4	Herod the Great died about the time of the Passover.
754	Jan. 1.	The vulgar era commences.
	A. D.	
	14	Augustus Cæsar died August 15, at Nola in Campania. TIBERIUS succeeded him.
	33	Christ was put to death.
	37	CAIUS CALIGULA succeeded to the empire.
	40	The name of Christians first given at Antioch to the disciples of Jesus Christ.
	41	CLAUDIUS, the uncle of Caligula, is raised to the throne by the soldiery after the assassination of his nephew; on which occasion a donative,—the first ever given on such an occasion,—was bestowed on the Prætorian Guards. Afterwards the practice was continued by each emperor, on assuming the purple. Herod Agrippa, who had been set free by Caligula, and raised to the dignity of king, goes to Jerusalem,

B

A. D.

- to take possession of the sovereignty. In order to conciliate the people he persecutes the Christians, puts James the Apostle to death, and imprisons Peter.
- 49 Claudius banishes all Jews from Rome.
- 50 Paul visits Athens.
- 53 DOMITIUS NERO, Emperor.
- 55 Paul goes to Jerusalem,—is there delivered up to the Roman Governor, and the next year conducted to Rome.
- 62 James, first bishop of Jerusalem, stoned by the Jews. Simeon elected in his room.
- 64 Rome burnt, and the Christians put to death as incendiaries.
- 66 Revolt of the Jews.
- 68 Julius Vindex, Pro-prætor in Gaul, revolts. GALBA, Governor of Spain, does the same. The last becomes Emperor in the room of Nero.
- 69 OTHO VITELLIUS and VESPASIANUS are elected Emperors successively.
- 70 Titus, son of Vespasianus, made Commander of the army sent against the Jews.
- 79 TITUS, Emperor.
- 81 DOMITIANUS, Emperor.
- 96 NERVA, Emperor.
- 97 The Apostle John writes his Gospel.
- 98 TRAJANUS, Emperor.
- 99 Trajanus arrives at Rome. John the Apostle dies at Ephesus.
- 102 C. PLINIUS appointed pro-consul of Bithynia. Decebalus, King of the Dacians, subdued by Trajanus.
- 103 Dacia reduced to a Roman Province.
- 106 Trajanus in the east.
- 115 A great earthquake at Antioch. A revolt of the Jews. Trajanus subdues the Parthians.
- 117 HADRIANUS, Emperor. The Parthians recover their liberty.

A. D.	
119	Plutarchus flourished about this time.
124	Quadratus and Aristides present an Apology for the Christians.
130	Hadrianus rebuilds Jerusalem, and calls it <i>Ælia Capitolina</i> . Revolt of the Jews.
131	Second revolt of the Jews.
134	Marcion begins to propagate his heresy: in it he maintains the doctrine of two principles:—good and evil.
135	An immense slaughter of the Jews which reduced Judæa nearly to a desert.
138	ANTONINUS PIUS, Emperor.
139	Justinus writes his first Apology for the Christians.
161	MARCUS AURELIUS ANTONINUS and LUCIUS <i>ÆLIUS VERUS</i> , Emperors.
170	Melito, Bishop of Sardis, composed his Apology.
180	COMMODUS, Emperor. Apollonius, a Christian philosopher, accused before Perennius. His accuser condemned to have his legs broken according to the Emperor's decree; but he himself beheaded because he would not recant. Euseb. lib. v. c. 21.
193	PERTINAX proclaimed Emperor, but, after two months, murdered by the soldiery; who for a bribe invest DIDIUS JULIANUS with the purple, but murdered him also after a two months' reign. PESCENNIUS NIGER and CLODIUS ALBINUS succeed him. Clement of Alexandria flourished about this time.
194	SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS, Emperor.
199	Controversy about the time of keeping Easter.
210	ANTONINUS, surnamed CARACALLA, Emperor.
217	MACRINUS, Emperor.
218	ANTONINUS ELAGABALUS, Emperor.
222	Elagabalus slain at the age of 18, after a reign of nearly four years of beastly de-

A. D.	bauchery, and succeeded by ALEXANDER SEVERUS.
233	Artaxerxes the Persian throws off the yoke of the Parthians and restores the Persian monarchy.
235	MAXIMINUS, a Pannonian, Emperor.
236	The GORDIANI, father and son, take on themselves the government, and the senate confirms them. They are defeated and slain by the troops of Maximinus. Origenes flourished about this time: he died aged 64, in the reign of Gallus.
237	D. CÆLIUS BALBINUS and M. CLODIUS PUPINUS MAXIMUS, Emperor. Maximinus and his son put to death. Both emperors slain by the soldiery.
238	GORDIANUS, Emperor, aged 13.
243	PHILLIPUS, præfect of the Prætorian guard, murders the Emperor, and assumes the purple. He himself is put to death in like manner after a time.
248	Cyprianus elected Bishop of Carthage. ¹
249	DECIUS, Emperor. He is slain in an engagement with the Goths, and succeeded by
251	GALLUS HOSTILIUS and his son VOLUSIANUS. They are murdered by the soldiery, and ÆMILIANUS, a Moor, proclaimed Emperor a year and a half after.
252	The plague ravages many provinces.
253	Æmilianus is slain by his own troops, and VALERIANUS proclaimed with his son Gallienus.
258	Cyprianus is beheaded.
260	GALLIENUS, sole Emperor.
267	After the death of her husband Odenatus, Zenobia assumes the government.
268	CLAUDIUS, Emperor.
269	He defeats the Goths.
270	AURELIANUS, Emperor.
271	The Alemanni and the Marcomanni ravage the empire.

A. D.	
273	Aurelianus vanquishes Zenobia and Tetricus the tyrant of Gaul. He abandons the province of Dacia on this side the Danube.
275	TACITUS, Emperor.
276	PROBUS, Emperor.
282	CARUS, Emperor.
283	CARINUS and NUMERIANUS, Emperors. DIO- CLETIANUS, a Dalmatian, and, as it is said, a freedman of the Senator Anullinus, is pro- claimed after the death of Numerianus.
285	Carinus is assassinated, and MAXIMIANUS de- clared co-emperor by Diocletianus.
292	Constantius Chlorus and Galerius declared Cæsars.
303	February 23. A general persecution of the Christians is commanded by an edict of Diocletianus.
305	Diocletianus and Maximianus resign the em- pire to Constantius and Galerius. Maxi- minus and Severus declared Cæsars.
306	CONSTANTINUS proclaimed Emperor by the army on the death of his father Constantius. Maximianus resumes the purple at Rome, drives out Severus, and associates with him- self his son Maxentius, whom he afterwards attempts to depose, but failing, flies from the city.
307	Licinius created Emperor by Galerius, Nov. 11. The empire has now six rulers; Maximianus, Galerius, Licinius, Maximinus, Constantinus, and Maxentius.
311	Constantinus marches against Maxentius and defeats him. An edict is published against informers.
312	Constantinus and Licinius publish an edict to stay the persecution of the Christians. Maximinus also publishes an edict in their favour.
313	The edict of Milan in favour of the Christians. The clergy are exempted from civil em-

- A. D.
- ployments. War of Licinius and Maximinus.
- 314 War between Licinius and Constantinus. A peace is concluded.
- 316 A law is published, making all ranks equally amenable to the punishment of the provincial governors for great crimes, without appeal to Rome.
- 319 An edict, 1st February, forbids aruspices or heathen priests to enter private houses and rewards informers in this case: 17th December, orders that those who consult such persons in public shall send the answer to the Emperor's Secretary.
- 320 Abrogates laws against celibacy:—forbids the officers of the revenue to exact payment by scourging or torment: forbids married men to keep concubines; commands the humane treatment of condemned criminals.
- 321 An edict forbidding work on the Lord's day.
- 322 Constantinus gains a victory over the Sarmatians.
- 323 Second war between Constantinus and Licinius. Defeat of the latter, September 18. Edict ordering the heathen temples to be shut up, and their revenues to be appropriated to charitable purposes.
- 325 A general Council of bishops assembled at Nikæa,—commonly called the Council of Nice. Gladiatorial combats forbidden; criminals sent to the mines instead of being thrown to wild beasts.
- 26 Crispus, the eldest son of Constantinus, hastily put to death on a false accusation, as was supposed.
- 330 The seat of empire is removed to Constantinople.
- 331 A Gothic war.
- 337 Constantinus dies at Nicomedia, May 22: aged 64.



ON THE
STATE OF MAN SUBSEQUENT TO
THE PROMULGATION OF
CHRISTIANITY.

TO THE READER.

IT is now nearly three years since I gave to the public a slight sketch of the history of man as a moral agent, during the ages which elapsed before the promulgation of christianity. It was my intention then to have followed it up immediately by a similar sketch of the moral state of man after that event. Distressing circumstances of a private nature prevented me from carrying my design into execution at that time, but it was not laid aside; and the interval, when leisure allowed, was spent in collecting materials for the intended work. As usually happens in such cases, these soon grew to a bulk far exceeding the usual limits of the "Small Books:" but considering the importance of the subject, grown yet more important from

the events which have occurred since No. XIV. went to the press ; considering moreover, that the only objection which criticism made to that work, was its shortness ; I have felt myself justified in increasing the size of the present number, and so dividing the subject into parts as to form a separate series, which may serve in some measure to fill a blank in English literature, by uniting a history of the progress of christianity with that of the progress of man. To do this as effectually as a student might wish, would require a larger work than, in this age of railroads, would be willingly read ; but at any rate, in this still brief sketch, a foundation will have been laid for those who wish to proceed farther in the study ; and the man of the world may perhaps find, that when he dismisses " Church history " from his thoughts, as a mere detail of squabbles about abstruse doctrines, or useless ceremonies, he has made a blunder, and will do well to retrace his steps.

Religion is not a thing apart, the mere business of a class of men who are paid to teach it as a trade : it is a real science, founded in the very nature of things, for it treats of the rela-

tion between man and his Maker:—it is not multiform, as in common parlance it is said to be, for there is but ONE TRUTH, simple as the ONE GOD who is that truth: it remains unaltered and unalterable, and finds a place as necessarily in moral science, which is in fact that of government, as the great forces of nature do in physical or mechanical science. But though unaltered and unalterable in its simple truths, man varies in his power of apprehending these truths: the imagination of the unscientific man stretches with difficulty to the ideas of eternity and infinity: his brain becomes weary of the exertion; and whatever terms he may use, or whatever creed he subscribes to, his thoughts cling to earthly and visible things; the God of his imagination has the attributes and feelings of an earthly sovereign; ceremony takes the place of soul-felt communion with the Deity; and if the grossness and ignorance of the multitude be very great, idolatry in some of its forms will take the place of spiritualised worship. Such was the case before the promulgation of christianity; yet as soon as the Sages of Greece began to investigate the nature of the First Cause, with minds trained by mathematical

and scientific research, the simple and eternal truths of religion again became visible to them, and put them at variance with an age too gross to understand or receive their refined doctrines.

What happened then must happen always: the man of science and the deep thinker will arrive at a simplicity and spirituality of belief which to a less trained mind appears like unbelief, because, in the deep thinker, the imaginative and visible part of religious life is postponed to those earnest communings of spirit with spirit, which are the real indwelling of God in the human soul. The first Christians were termed Atheists by the heathen, because no statue graced their places of worship, or received their homage as the representative of some divine attribute: in modern Italy the same term is bestowed on those who doubt the almighty power of the virgin or the pope; and, in modern England, he who finds that the Bible contains mistakes in natural science and in chronology, and who hints that if the words of scripture had been all and every divinely inspired, the Deity, to be consistent, should have protected them from the mistakes of transcribers,—that therefore

the thousands of various readings make a *prima facie* case against the *verbal* inspiration of those works, and the mistakes in chronology, &c. a further case against their *complete* inspiration—if, I say, any scientific man who cannot avoid seeing this, but who in nowise finds his religious faith thereby shaken, ventures to record his opinion publicly, he is instantly attacked with injurious epithets by those whose minds cannot stretch to the same degree of spiritualism, and however his life may give evidence of the best fruits of christianity, he is called a rationalist* and an infidel.

This is no time for shrinking from questions of this nature: if christianity be true, it must have in itself the power of developing that spiritualism which is the highest privilege of man, and of which the highest intellects most feel the need; and to endeavour to tie down the free mind of England to the forms and ceremonies of a bygone age, and a slavish dependence on the dicta of a self-constituted and irresponsible tribunal, is as unwise as it is futile.

* That this should be a term of reproach argues ill of those that use it; since we have a high sanction for our endeavour to give a *reason* for the hope that is in us.

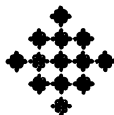
The consequence to us would be no less fatal than the persecution of the philosophers was to Greece. They compounded for a quiet life by keeping their opinions to themselves, and the people sunk deeper and deeper in ignorance and gross vice, till the spirit of the nation rotted away, and Athens and Sparta existed only in name: and thus in England, if the calls of the people for less of ceremony and more of vital christianity, be met by more of form and less of spirit, while those who see their way more clearly are silenced by clamour, the minds of men will be embittered; the leaders of science, as in France and Germany, will become the leaders of revolution; and the people, plunged in ignorance and vice, caring nothing for a ministration in the church which they cannot understand, and finding nothing in vestments and forms which can satisfy the straightforward sense of an age of practical science and commerce, will follow these leaders, and endeavour to establish something more suited to the times.

Yet where is there a country whose institutions might, if properly used, so minister to the well being of the people? and are we

to wait quietly to see all these swept away in a torrent of revolutionary violence, because we are resolved that what our forefathers did and thought must be the perfection of wisdom! *Μη γενοίτο!* Let us still see in every village in England a gentleman civilising and humanising the rude people around him; listening to their wants, entering into their occupations and thoughts, till he can make himself understood and trusted by them,—raising them in the scale of being, and making them capable of a more spiritualised faith by a really improved education. Let us find him praying *with*, rather than *for* them in the services of the church; and hear him in the pulpit, not enforcing obsolete doctrines, or repeating trite admonitions, but following in the steps of his Master, by joining amusement with instruction; for when Christ condescended to teach, the people were won to listen and to think by apologues and short precepts which caught the attention, and were easily remembered; the bare doctrine was reserved for the learned Nicodemus; and even Nicodemus had first been led to seek for further instruction, from hearing the usual popular teaching of the Divine preacher.

It will be my object in the present work to trace the reciprocal effect of christianity on the people and the laws, and of these on christianity. I shall endeavour to give a fair view of the doctrines and customs of the church in every century, from contemporary writers, and thus afford the reader means of judging for himself on those questions of ancient practice which are now so often mooted: he will then see how much of the doctrines and ceremonies now held to be of importance in different churches can be traced to apostolic authority, how much to godly usage, and how much to later innovation. I shall further endeavour, by giving a sketch of the political events of the times, and the state of the people, whenever we are able to trace it, to enable him to judge how far the institutions of those times are suitable to our own, or likely to have been established by men anxious for the welfare of mankind in the nineteenth century. I shall make few comments: those will be best made by the reader; but I shall endeavour to elucidate facts and their causes, and clear away from the history of the times as far as may be, the clouds of prejudice with which its chroniclers

have involved it. Each part will give the history of a period of time terminated by some remarkable change in the state of civilised man; so as to be in itself a complete work: and the whole, if my life be spared so long, shall be concluded with a review of the present state and prospects of society, with which, in all probability, I shall take my leave of the public, after having given up to it about twelve of the best years of my intellectual life; unregrettingly, if I may but have brought even one step nearer that kingdom of God upon earth which we are all taught to pray and to hope for.





INTRODUCTION.

BEFORE proceeding to give a review of the effect of the new spiritualised system on mankind, it will be necessary to take a short view of the state of manners prevailing in the world at the time when a few poor fishermen of Galilee went forth at the command of the Carpenter's Son, to change the whole course of action and of thought, from the highest to the lowest grade in society. Their master, who could have assumed the crown at any moment, and who would have had a nation of warriors at his beck the instant that he raised the standard of David; whose divine power would have rendered all human opposition useless, had proclaimed that his kingdom was not of this world: they went forth to their great work, therefore, strong in the Word of Truth which was in their mouths, and the confidence of a blessed immortality which filled their hearts; but with no other power than that of their mission, to effect a

work so mighty that no human mind can even yet calculate the whole of the results. Let us see what was the world into which they went forth "as sheep among wolves," to humanise, and civilise, and regenerate mankind.

With the exception of some of the remote empires of Asia, the Roman arms had subdued the whole civilised world: the profligate kingdoms which had sprung out of the great Perso-Macedonian empire were absorbed, and were now provinces of the all grasping republic: and the conquerors, with the riches, had also gained the vices of the conquered nations: let us hear the pupil of Niebuhr describe the state of the Roman empire during the period of the triumvirate. "At the election of magistrates bribery was carried on in the most open and unscrupulous manner; and the dregs of the city, which fed upon bribery, decided upon the most important affairs of the state—the former was the scene of civil bloodshed, bands of armed slaves and gladiators occupying it, and deciding by the dagger or the sword what ought to have been settled by free and rational discussion. The administration of the provinces, and of justice kept pace, in

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point of corruption, with the political and moral degeneracy of the people: murder, poisoning, forged wills, robbery, perjury, and the like, became crimes of every day occurrence. Warlike virtue and patriotism had disappeared more and more ever since the beginning of the civil wars. The soldiers in the rich provinces in which they were often stationed for a number of years, became demoralized and effeminate. Their love of money and plunder naturally led them to serve him who most connived at their excesses, and when a mutiny broke out among them, the commander had generally to yield, often appeasing them by promising rich rewards. But how great misery did those rewards, which usually consisted in the assignment and distribution of lands, inflict on the peaceful inhabitants of the country in which the soldiers received settlements. It is attested by Cicero that the arrival of a governor, even in a peaceful province, was little different from the entrance of a victorious army into the country of a vanquished enemy. The provincials had indeed the right to prosecute their oppressors; but the judges were either the accomplices of the culprits, or had an

interest in keeping things as they were. The licentiousness of the populace, the avarice of the great, the general effeminacy, combined with the most heartless cruelty, reached an almost incredible height. The licentiousness and immorality among women was almost greater than among the other sex, and the natural consequence was, that men preferred living in concubinage to entering the state of legal matrimony. This corrupt state of domestic life naturally exercised its influence upon the education of the young: they were neglected by their parents, and left to the care of Greek slaves, who taught them the Greek language and Greek manners." Add to all this that the disgusting rites of Bacchus had been introduced from Greece, and those of Isis from Egypt; that the gladiatorial shows accustomed the people, young and old, male and female, to scenes of bloody cruelty; that the ceremonies and symbols of their religion were obscene or contemptible; their dramatic exhibitions coarse and immoral: and we shall have a picture of manners which may well make us shudder.

The portion of the world unsubdued by the Romans was still, for the most part, in a state

of barbarism. The steppes of Asia, and the forests of the North of Europe, were roamed over by wild and warlike tribes, professing a dark and bloody superstition; but who were, to a certain degree, strangers to the vices which wealth and luxury had engendered in the more civilised races; and combated for their freedom with desperate valour. Among nomade tribes the women share with the men their hardy occupations; and accordingly, females appear to have been held in higher respect among the wild tribes of the north than among the more civilised nations of the south. They were the companions of their husbands in labour, in danger, and in war;* and the life led by all, though rude, was not without its rude virtues also. According to Cæsar, the German tribes had not been corrupted into absolute idolatry: the sun, moon, and fire, alone received their worship: and thus, though cruel and fierce as barbarians are wont to be, they had among them the germ of better things.

Philosophy had greatly degenerated: sophists had taken the place of real searchers

* TACIT. *Germ.* cxviii.

after truth; and the questions which occupied both professors and students in the later schools, were frequently coarse, and generally frivolous. The lofty speculations and high aspirations of the Ionic school, which Plato in part embodied in his writings, had given way to the doctrines of the New Academy, which taught that there was no certain truth, and that therefore no determinate opinion could be formed on any subject; and in morals held the rather questionable doctrine that the great end of man's life should be the enjoyment of natural principles,* which, like that of Epicurus, that happiness was the summum bonum, might be misinterpreted by the sensualist into a justification of his excesses, however the teacher, and even the better followers of the sect, might perceive that neither could be enjoyed in perfection save in a life of temperance and virtue. Still the last scintilla of the pure spiritualism of Anaxagoras had in it so much of divine light, that of all the philosophic sects the Platonists alone appear to have furnished many converts to Christianity.

* "Frui principiis naturalibus."—Cic. *de Fin.* l. ii. c. 11.

In Judea, though the forms of the Mosaic law were outwardly observed, its vital principle was gone. The Pharisees made their zeal for the law the cloak for political ambition and cruel oppression, whilst they held the power in their hands. The forms of their temple worship, which were accommodated to a rude period of society, were so identified with their existence as an independent nation, since the heroes of the Asmonæan race had purified the temple and freed their land from the yoke of the strangers at the same time; that the people clung to them with a fierce determination which had in it far less of religion than national pride: and these forms, taken without the spiritualising comments of the prophets, were but tangible and visible things, which by no means elevated or enlarged the mind. Any encroachment on the ceremonies of their religion, any attempt to introduce the gods of the surrounding nations into the sacred precincts, was a direct attack on their national independence, and was resisted accordingly; but the "traditions of the elders" had superseded all spiritual religion. The fearful crimes which marked the last war of the Jews, and which ter-

minated in the destruction of Jerusalem, show that this must have been the case very generally.

From the sketch here given it is evident that even the arts of civilisation had not brought with them any of the refinements of society which have generally been supposed to follow in their train. Vice was not the less gross in Greece and Rome because the utmost skill ministered to its indulgence: and probably the most polished individual of the most polished nations of antiquity would have been banished from modern society as a semi-barbarian, although his house might have displayed works of art which we in vain attempt to imitate. Few can now estimate the extent of the corruption which pervaded all ranks, and both sexes; for the disgust which we feel at the recital, prevents writers and readers alike from dwelling upon it: yet however disgusting it may be, it is desirable that it should at least be known that such was the case; for without, in some measure, placing ourselves in those times, we can scarcely form any notion of the state from which we were rescued, or the mighty obligations which we lie under to the peasant of Galilee.



CHAPTER I.

FIRST CENTURY.

THE Roman power had for some time been consolidated under the vigorous rule of Augustus Cæsar: the kingdom of Judæa, as yet independent, though among the subservient allies of Rome, was still governed by Herod the Great, when a woman in humble station gave birth to a child which she herself regarded as a supernatural being, but which others, naturally enough, concluded to be the son of the honest carpenter to whom she had been lately married. Some singular events marked the epoch; but the affairs of the poor are rarely much inquired into by the rich and the great: and even when the slaughter of the young children at Bethlehem was enough noised abroad to be reported, though erroneously, to Augustus, and drew forth a witticism from the emperor,* the

* “When he (Augustus) heard that among the children of two years old whom Herod the king of the Jews

character of Herod and his deeds of insane cruelty were so generally known, that few would concern themselves much to look for a cause. The king died, and the massacre of a few children was probably almost forgotten among the many bloody and tyrannical acts, which for some slight cause, or none at all, he had at various times been guilty of.* Thus the young Jesus grew up without exciting any attention: for even when at twelve years old he showed himself in the temple, and conversed with the doctors there, they seem only to have considered him as a fine intelligent boy, anxious for improvement: and perhaps imagined that, like another Samuel, he was to be devoted thus early to the service of the

had commanded to be put to death in Syria, he had likewise killed his own son, he observed that 'it was better to be Herod's hog than his son.'"—MACROB. *Saturnal.* l. ii. c. 4.

* When this king found himself to be dying, he ordered a number of persons of the first families to be confined in the circus at Jericho, where he then lay, and gave orders to his sister and her husband to execute them the moment that he expired, thus hoping to prevent the rejoicings which he was well assured would be made when the news of his death became public. It is hardly needful to say that the command was not obeyed; but it may serve to show the character of the man.

Lord. But though "astonished at his understanding," it does not appear that their surprise went farther than that which we often feel at the sight of a boy in humble life who has contrived to attain an education beyond his apparent opportunities.

In this obscurity the youth grew up unnoticed; and it was not till he was entering on his thirtieth year, soon after the commencement of John's preaching, that he took any step towards making known his mission on earth. His first public act however was highly significant: he chose twelve apostles (*αποστολοι*, or messengers sent), a number always remarkable to the Jews, for it referred to the twelve tribes, and coincided with the twelve princes of Israel, who led the march under Moses. In addition to these he chose seventy inferior disciples, who in like manner appeared to represent the seventy elders nominated by Moses for his assistance in hearing causes, a court which survived even to that time, under the title of the Great Sanhedrim.

These acts, in the eyes of the people then existing, must have been acts of dominion; he was evidently claiming to be the "prophet like

unto Moses," whose advent that legislator had foretold, and for whom he had bespoken the obedience of the nation: and accordingly we find that from this time the jealousy of the ruling powers was excited. The Pharisees, bigoted adherents to the law as handed down in the traditions of the elders, and well acquainted with their ancient prophecies, were now fully expecting that the long foretold son of David would soon show himself. They abhorred the rule of the Idumæan Herod; and had Jesus been in a situation to seize at once on the government, probably they would have supported him with their whole power; hoping to rule by his means, as they had already done under some of the Asmonæan princes. But the poor Carpenter was too contemptible a leader; and they feared nevertheless, that the people might make some mad outbreak which would draw on them the Roman arms. Hence their endeavour to hush the matter up, when any supernatural work of the new preacher created enthusiasm among the people: hence the unwillingness to believe in his prophetic mission even: hence the stern resolution to cut him off, lest he should be the remote cause of their losing that independence

which he could not assist them in preserving. The general belief in prodigies; in the influence of evil spirits; in magic; and other superstitions, prevented the miraculous acts of Christ from being thoroughly convincing. Those who *wished* to disregard his Divine Mission could easily satisfy their own minds by concluding him to be a skilful magician; and it was only among the common people, whose straight forward reasoning went no farther than "whereas I was blind, now I see;" and "if this man were not of God he could do nothing;"* that he found a hearing. "Have any of the rulers or Pharisees believed on him?"† was the triumphant question of the Jewish authorities, when their officers, who had been commissioned to arrest him, returned without performing their bidding. "We are Moses' disciples," say the examiners of the man who had been born blind, "We know that God spake unto Moses: but we know not whence this man is."

To us, this appears obstinacy: but it must be remembered that the preaching of Christ went to do away with the Mosaic law; the

* *John ix. 25-33.*

† *John vii. 47.*

venerated, and justly venerated legacy of their forefathers: a law whose infringement had always brought severe punishment in its train:—could that man be sent by God, who sought to abrogate it?—Even a conscientious Jew might doubt,—and, like Nicodemus, would only suspend his judgment and wait for further information. “Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?”—was his quiet observation to his more violent colleagues. When therefore to the reasonable cause for doubt, was added the powerful motive of self-interest, we can hardly wonder that the young Carpenter was looked at with suspicion and alarm. The greater his popularity, the greater the danger. The Romans willingly caught at any pretext for incorporating fresh provinces into their empire, and an insurrection, such as this singularly gifted preacher might at any time give rise to, would afford one. “The Romans would come and take away their place and nation.”

Let us place ourselves for a moment in the situation of the Jews:—let us imagine a preacher, a man from among the people, calling together numbers, and addressing them in the open air from any eminence he could find:

condemning our rulers, as covetous, immoral hypocrites;—pronouncing our constitution and laws to be obsolete, or rendered of none effect by the glosses of lawyers; and finally announcing that it is his mission to abrogate them altogether, and substitute for them his own dicta. Let us suppose further that there was some cause for such animadversions; that our rulers were not immaculate: that our laws would not bear on all occasions a close comparison with the eternal principles of justice and truth—and finally that the dicta which were to be substituted for them were strictly in conformity with these great principles,—so strictly so, that the working out of the new system would change the whole face of society, give privileges to those who never had had any before; take away power from those who had possessed it, and establish a general equality of the human race before God, such as no lawgiver had ever before thought of. Should we listen with much satisfaction, or be very willing converts to such doctrines? Should we not dread the impracticability of such a system: the general disorganization it must produce? Would not our prejudices in favour of “our glorious constitution” operate

on many minds:—the jealousy of power, the lust of wealth, on many more; the timidity which shrinks from change lest it should go too far,—on a yet greater number?—If this would be the case among us; and who would be so bold as to say that it would not? let us not too hastily condemn the Jewish Rulers and Priesthood for their opposition to ONE whom as yet they knew not;—whom many, probably, regarded as an enthusiast,—some, as an impostor; some, as a person who derived his supernatural power from unlawful practices, and whose doctrines, all must perceive, could only lead to a total change in the existing order of things.

So bold and uncompromising an innovator could not be *tolerated*;—he must either be received as the Lord of all, “come to his own,” or he must be sacrificed, even though innocent of moral wrong,—to avoid the political evil which his preaching was likely to produce. The Jewish rulers chose the latter course; and like all who imagine that public acts are exempted from the rules of right and wrong which regulate private life, they suffered a bitter penalty for their condemnation of ONE whom at any rate they knew to be an in-

nocent man ; and in whom, if they could for a moment have forgotten their prejudices, they might have seen something more than a mere man. Had they listened to the peaceful doctrines of the gospel, the fatal insurrections which drew upon them the Roman arms would never have occurred ; the nation would not have been dispersed ; and Mount Zion might still have been " the glory of all lands : " the centre from which the light of the gospel would have radiated into the whole world.

The dreaded teacher was at length put to death : his few disciples concealed themselves in grief and terror, and the sect was apparently crushed :—but suddenly they re-appear, boldly proclaiming the message which they had been charged with by their Lord ;—endued by him with the like supernatural powers. And now their converts are reckoned by thousands, and again the Rulers of the Jews tremble for their authority, and take Peter and John into custody. The same notions which led to the sacrifice of Jesus evidently actuate them on this occasion : they do not doubt the miracle but they suspect magic :—" By what power or what name have ye done this ? " is the question : and when

these "unlearned and ignorant men,"*—so their own historian styles them,—boldly avow their mission, and the Rulers at last recognise them as the former followers of Jesus; the alarmed functionaries endeavour to procure their silence by threats; thinking probably that with such men this would be sufficient. It is remarkable that though Jesus was of no higher apparent rank than his followers, the members of the Council never seem to have attempted, as in the case of his disciples, to gain their end by menace. They shrunk, awed, from the dignified demeanour and native elegance of the poor Carpenter's Son!—"Never man spake like this man!"—was the exclamation of the men employed to take him into custody. No such *prestige* surrounded the poor Galilæan fisherman; nevertheless the Word of God "grew mightily and prevailed;" and very soon that word which had at first been whispered only in a closed chamber, was proclaimed aloud in the Areiopagus of Athens, and before the tribunals of Rome, while the sinner in his pride of power and place trembled before the intrepid preacher of "temperance, righteousness, and judgment to come."†

* Acts iv. 13.

† Acts xxiv. 25.

This preacher was a Cilician Jew, of good family, who had received a learned education, and profited by it. He was young and ardent; had begun by being a persecutor of the christians, but was suddenly converted to their faith; and to his preaching more especially, was confided the spreading of the gospel among the Greeks; for he had studied their literature, and was a proficient in the arts of rhetoric and disputation.

What the state of society was, which this able and bold preacher of the truth had to encounter and to amend, has already been noticed;* his own epistles addressed to the Greek churches bear ample testimony to the utter dissolution of manners in these countries, nor have we any reason to suppose that it was less in any part of the Roman dominions. The causes of this were various; but none of them probably were so efficient as the universal prevalence of slavery. This has often been objected to in modern times, but seldom on true grounds; for the subject of declama-

* See No. XIV. of these tracts; see also another work by the same author entitled *Pericles*; a tale of Athens in the eighty-third Olympiad, as well as *Charicles*, by Professor BEKKER.

tion has usually been, the wrong done to the slave by depriving him of his liberty :—the wrong done to society by surrounding every family with a number of persons ready to minister to every evil passion, unable, even though reluctant, to resist the will of the master, and too often not even reluctant; could hardly fail to have the most fatal consequences as regarded morals: for these degraded persons were the nurses and companions of the children, the confidants and tools of the youths of the family.* Thus society had a canker in its very vitals, which soon showed itself in every relation of life. The traffic in female slaves led to the most disgraceful consequences; hardened the heart, and desecrated the sanctity of those domestic ties which elevate man above the brute. The ease with which slave labour could be attained prevented all attempts to improve machinery, or to apply the resources of science to industrial purposes; the unwilling slave executed his work in the

* The results of this will be amply seen in the comedies both of Plautus and of Terentius. One of the standing jests in these is the beating given to the crafty slave by the father of the young man whose vices and extravagances he had fostered.

coarsest manner, brought with him into the palaces of the more courtly Romans the rude habits of the barbarian,* his coarse and illiterate tastes, and tinged even his lord with some of the grossness with which he was thus in daily juxta-position. Husbandry made no advance, for the captives taken in war were usually sent to the farms, and these, arrived at man's estate in a state of savage ignorance, were unable to do more than execute the manual labour assigned them by the overseer, in the usual method of their own barbarous home; and thus whether in the city or the country the slave population was the curse of the land, and paid back, by the very evils incident to their condition, a righteous retribution for the wrongs done them.†

* In the Greek Comedies we find that the attendance of slaves at the banquets had the same evil attending it which is complained of in the case of the negro, and the abundant use of perfume became a matter rather of necessity than luxury.

† The harsh laws made to protect the life and property of the master from the attempts of his slaves, which I shall have occasion to mention as I proceed, are a sufficient proof that these wrongs were considerable, and frequently resented. Some lines from Ovidius show that it was not unusual to *chain* the slave who acted as porter to the door-post, in order to secure his fulfilling his office. v. BEKKER, *Gallus*, vol. i. p. 24.

It was amid the members of a social system thus constituted that the christian teacher had to preach the liberty of the gospel, and the equality of all men before God: he had to announce that the slave was not less than his master in the sight of the Deity;—had equal duties to perform, equal rewards to hope for;—that woman, very generally degraded to a mere *thing*, was an intellectual being, accountable before her Creator for the rational soul bestowed on her, which no bondage could extinguish:—and that children, who, in most ancient states, were mere chattels of the father, liable to be sold to pay his debts or supply his needs, were the especial favourites of the Deity, and the model on which the christian was to form his own character. It was a difficult task to make this doctrine palatable to the dominant portion of society, and equally difficult to prevent it from being made an ill use of by the other part; for among uncultivated minds the first proclamation of liberty is usually the signal for the casting off *all* restraint, whether oppressive or not. The task was difficult, but it was accomplished with singular judgment and success. The proclamation of equal

rights and duties was accompanied by earnest exhortations to submit to existing customs and laws, wherever they did not interfere with the direct and immutable distinctions of right and wrong:—slaves were exhorted, as a part of their duty to God, to obey their masters and serve them faithfully, even though they might be “froward” and harsh in their conduct towards them, “with good will doing service, as unto the Lord, and not unto men:”*—women, in like manner, were required, in Christ’s name, to conform without murmuring to the usages of the country, that they might give no occasion to the heathen adversaries of christianity “to speak reproachfully:”† to stay within;—to submit to their husbands;—not to appear in public without a veil;—to avoid embroidery and costly apparel; to take no part in the assemblages of men; such being the custom of maids and matrons of good character in all the Grecian states: and all these things are expressly required by the apostle in order that no scandal should attach to the profession of christianity: for the liberty of the

* *Ephesians* vi. 7. † *1 Tim.* v. 14. *Tit.* ii. 5.

gospel would easily have been misinterpreted and maligned; and the doctrine itself might thus have fallen into disrepute. Children also were exhorted to the unhesitating obedience which ancient manners required: but whilst he called for this submission to existing usages in the name of God, who would count it as service done to himself; he no less earnestly inculcated on masters, husbands, and fathers, a set of duties, till then little thought of or practised, and that, upon the ground that there was in the heavens A MASTER of the master; and that there was no respect of persons with Him.

So effectual was this teaching that none, even of the enemies of christianity, have ever brought forward an instance of domestic insubordination consequent upon the new doctrine:* the christian servant, wife, or child was but the more anxious to fulfil, "as unto God" all the duties which his or her situation on the then social system imposed: no servile

* We shall see at a later period a husband suing his wife, she having embraced christianity, for denying him conjugal rights. She herself hereupon pleaded her cause before the emperor, and proved that he had demanded of her such vicious compliances, that she was held justified by her judge in the course she had pursued.

war followed the proclamation of equal rights; and the slave bore his fate patiently, looking for the freedom of a better world. The profound wisdom of these injunctions cannot but be instantly recognised; for persons unaccustomed to self-guidance are unable at first to exercise new rights with discretion; and the mind must be formed to thought by long training, ere it becomes capable of acting under new circumstances. The slave, brutalised by hardships and severity, had no self-command; and even as late as the time of Clement of Alexandria, we find that writer anxiously endeavouring to teach some few of those decencies of life which even a common labourer of modern England would not wholly disregard. So too, the Greek woman, shut up within the walls of the Gynæceum, without literature or mental culture, would have found in the freedom to mix in men's society which modern European custom allows, only an occasion for licence, such as no rational teacher could desire.

The records of the first proceedings of the apostles of Christ are so scanty that we must depend more on the conclusions to be drawn from casual hints than on any actual history :

from these slight notices however we may gather that the diligence of these preachers and their pupils had been such, that converts had been made throughout the whole Roman empire, and even beyond it, at a very early period. The tradition of the church assigns Egypt to Mark the Evangelist, Parthia to the Apostle Thomas; Andrew is said to have devoted himself to Scythia; John to Asia Minor, where he took up his abode, and died at Ephesus.* Peter preached to the dispersed Jews; Paul's journeyings we gather from his own epistles, as well as from the Acts of the Apostles. He is said also to have visited Spain.

The death of Christ took place, as is well known, about A.D. 33, in the reign of the Emperor Tiberius;† and during the thirty following years the preaching of the gospel met with scarcely any opposition from the ruling powers, excepting among the Jews. Cornelius, a Roman Centurion, was converted A.D. 37; and a few years after, Sergius

* EUSEB. *Hist. Ecc.* lib. ii. c. 16.—lib. iii. c. i.

† The vulgar era differs from the common one by about four years, but this is of no consequence in the consideration of general results.

Paulus, the pro-consul of Cyprus. Dionysius, a member of the council of the Areiopagus at Athens, consequently one who had borne high office in the state, was convinced by the discourse of Paul before that body, about A.D. 53: and indeed, so great had been the success of the apostles in their mission, that we find the unbelieving Jews at Thessalonica complaining that "the men who had turned the world upside down, were come thither also:"* a proof that great numbers must have been converted to the faith, and that the change in their life and conversation had been considerable enough to excite notice.

During this time the Jewish nation had again passed from the condition of a Roman province to that of an independent sovereignty under Herod Agrippa, the grandson of Herod the Great. This prince having been retained in captivity by Tiberius, was liberated by Caius Caligula, and elevated to the tetrarchy of his deceased uncle Philip; and finally, at the accession of Claudius, received the kingdom of Judæa and Samaria in addition. It was during his reign that James the Apostle was

* *Acts* xvii. 6.

put to death, and Peter was imprisoned; but at the death of this monarch, which happened shortly after, Judæa relapsed into a Roman province, although young Agrippa was permitted to retain some part of the regal dignity; for he nominated the high priest, and he is occasionally termed *king*; although not regularly invested. This was the Agrippa before whom Paul defended himself when allowed by Festus to plead his own cause. Excepting however in the point of idolatry, —which the Jews resisted with a pertinacity which astonished all their heathen governors, —as well now, under the Romans, as formerly during the sway of the Seleucidæ,—the habits of the people differed little from those of surrounding nations. Rome was the metropolis of the world, and the fashions of Rome were adopted among the higher classes here as elsewhere. Herod Agrippa built an amphitheatre, and exhibited gladiatorial shows, with no other difference from those of Rome than that the chief of the persons who thus fought were criminals, “to the number of seven hundred of a side;” says Josephus; “thus improving the punishment of the criminals to the pleasure of the spectators; for they were

all destroyed to the last man.”* Such were some of the *pleasures* of the civilised world at that time!—

I shall not here repeat what all can find elsewhere,—namely the state of Rome itself under the first Cæsars; yet still, notwithstanding the general dissolution of manners, almost the only opposition offered to the spread of the gospel appears to have been that of the unbelieving Jews settled in the different cities of the empire. It would seem that this was the case even in Rome itself; for, according to Suetonius, such tumults took place there among the Jews, “incited by one Chrestus,” † that the Emperor Claudius commanded all of that nation to quit the city: but the progress of the gospel was not arrested by this, for the epistle of Paul to the Romans, written before he had ever visited that city, ‡ shows that the number of converts was considerable, and those not altogether of the meaner sort: and in the epistle to the Philip-

* *Antiq. lib. xix.*

† Suet. in loc. This was a name not unfrequently given to Christ and the christians by the heathens.
v. TERTULL. *Apol.*

‡ Probably about A.D. 58.

pians, written a few years after, we find greetings from "the saints of Cæsar's household"—to the church at Philippi; moreover in the beginning of that epistle the Apostle observes that his bonds,—for he was then a prisoner,—had turned out for the furtherance of the gospel: for that the cause of his imprisonment, &c., the enmity of the Jews,—was known to the whole Prætorium, and elsewhere; and that the brethren in consequence of this, grew daily bolder in preaching the word.

A circumstance took place about this time in which perhaps the wide spread of the christian doctrine in Rome was not without its influence, and which possibly might also have some share in causing the shortly subsequent persecution. About A.D. 61, Pedanius Secundus, the præfect of the city, was murdered by one of his slaves, to whom, it seems, he had refused his freedom after having fixed the price of it; and whose rival in love he appears also to have been.* The law of Rome decreed that when a master was killed by one of his domestics, all the other slaves should be

* TACIT. *Ann.* l. xiv. c. 42.

put to death also, without further enquiry; on the presumption that they must have connived at the murder. In this instance the number of these unfortunate persons, including women and children, amounted to four hundred; and the populace, struck with horror at a wholesale execution like this, where so many of them must necessarily have been innocent, rose in tumult to prevent the enforcing so barbarous a law. The senate met to deliberate, and after a hot debate, on the motion of Caius Cassius, voted that the law should be acted upon. The tumult grew:—the emperor called out his troops to repress it, and through lines of soldiers, who drove back the people, and kept the way open, these miserable victims of an inhuman law were led to execution, amid the groans, threats, and imprecations of the incensed multitude. Even Nero was almost ashamed of this severity, and when in addition to this, the banishment of the freed-men with their families was called for, he refused his assent.

We can only conjecture the cause of the popular resistance to this act of cruelty; but as such a law could not have been viewed by the majority of the senate as a valuable relic

of antiquity, unless it had at some time been enforced without causing any public demonstration of displeasure, so we may perhaps be justified in assuming that the humane feelings which it is the object of christianity to awaken and to strengthen, were beginning to influence many. As these feelings showed themselves in the form of insurrection against the orders of the constituted authorities, it is not unlikely that this outbreak, whether really caused by the doctrine of the brotherhood of all mankind, or not, would be reckoned among the ill consequences of its promulgation; and might incline the tyrant to snatch at the first occasion for repressing a sect which seemed likely to be troublesome. The earnest exhortations of the apostles to avoid "all appearance of evil"—to submit themselves to the ruling powers—"to be peaceable, and to mind their own business," show that they had either seen, or at least apprehended a tendency in their converts to resist the iniquitous proceedings of the government.

Nero had already been upon the throne some years, and the first fair promise of his youth had been stifled in the most infamous debaucheries. The wide spread of the chris-

tian doctrines, which gained a more ready audience probably, in consequence of the very excesses of the sovereign, disgusting even to his heathen subjects, seems to have given umbrage to the licentious emperor:—christians were not tools to be used for the purposes of cruelty and vice, and yet in his very household already many christians were numbered. About A. D. 64, Rome was almost destroyed by a conflagration, and the conduct of Nero on this occasion gave rise to an opinion that he was himself the incendiary. Alarmed at the probable consequences to himself if this should gain general credence, he attempted to throw the blame of it on the new sect; and ordered all whom he could discover of that persuasion, “an immense multitude,” says Tacitus, to be put to death by the most cruel tortures; till again a curb was put to these proceedings by the indignation of the people; for the punishment of the christians was considered rather as another instance of the emperor’s frantic cruelty, than as a penalty inflicted for any specific crime.*

* TACIT. *Ann.* lib. xv. c. 45. According to the tradition of the church, both Peter and Paul suffered death during this persecution.

The oppression of the Roman governors, added to the insults offered to their religion by the insane vanity of the emperors,* at last drove the Jewish nation to desperation, and they betook themselves to arms. The rebellion ended, as is well known, in the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, and the total dispersion of the nation.† The circumstances attending this event, so amply detailed by Josephus, the Jewish historian, need not here be repeated: the fierceness of the defence, and the cruelty of the victors, are but the common occurrences in the sieges of great cities in ancient times, and speak rather of the general state of the world than of anything special on this occasion. The same tale might have been told in many other instances, had any historian survived the massacre to tell of the ruin of his native place.‡

* Caius Caligula had ordered his statue to be set up in the holy place, but rescinded the decree on hearing of the tumults it occasioned.

† The triumphal arch of the conqueror is still to be seen at Rome. It exhibits the only representation now remaining to us of the costly vessels of the Jewish temple.

‡ The capture of Miletus some centuries earlier was attended with circumstances of such horror that the Athenian people fined the poet who dared to harrow their feelings by representing it on the stage.

In A.D. 79, according to the vulgar reckoning, Pompeii and Herculaneum were overwhelmed during the memorable eruption of Vesuvius described by the younger Plinius. After being lost for many ages, a portion of these buried cities was restored to light during the last century; and the excavations made have afforded us a large knowledge of the domestic life and manners of heathen Italy. The great resemblance in all remains of Roman greatness or colonization, even in far distant countries, leads to a conclusion that the fashions of the metropolis spread even to its remotest provinces. The remains of the buried cities fully confirm the complete depravation of morals described by the Latin satirists: and amid proofs of great proficiency in the arts of painting and sculpture, we find ornaments, pictures, and even household utensils so licentious, not to say obscene in their design, that it has been thought proper to close the doors of the room in which they are deposited at Naples, allowing only those to enter who need the view for the sake of scientific research. This tells much of the state of manners among the middling ranks, for Pompeii evidently must have been inhabited chiefly by them.

since the houses are small, and the town generally bears the stamp of a place of second rate importance. Had a Hebrew prophet been called upon to give an account of the ruin of Pompeii, it would probably have been in such terms as those used in describing that of Sodom: the catastrophe was similar, the sins of which it appeared the righteous punishment were equal.

Britain, meantime, was almost wholly subdued by the arms or the policy of Rome; and our rude ancestors began to receive more and more of the civilisation of their masters. Probably the establishment of the Roman power was more owing to the faults of the native princes than the military skill of the governors: the Roman sway was steady; it maintained peace; and the cultivators under their protection, could gather the fruits of the earth in safety. The continual dissensions amid the petty chiefs, under whose sway the country had previously remained, must have harassed the people; and as in India, the British power, though not without faults, is more just than that of the native rulers, and the natives in consequence submit to it quietly; so in Britain the Roman dominion was con-

solidated by a sense of the benefits, among many evils, which it brought with it. We have no means of knowing with certainty how soon christianity was introduced into the island, we only know that it was so at an early period, though the invasions of the northern tribes in a later age again heathenized the country.

In the other parts of the empire christianity was spreading among the people. Though Nero had put to death an immense number in Rome, there was no pretext for accusing the christians in the provinces; for they, necessarily, were innocent of any share in the conflagration, and we do not find that the neglect of the public rites of the heathen deities was imputed to them as a crime till the reign of Domitianus, when they were considered either as a sect of the Jews, a nation held to be the constant enemy of Rome, or as Judaizing apostates from the laws of their forefathers. With an even-handed injustice, which would almost make it appear that the offence of the christians was, their pure morality, Domitianus banished from Rome at the same time all who professed philosophy, and put to death all who were enough dis-

tinguished by virtue, riches, or talent, to excite his envy, his cupidity, or his fears. According to Eusebius, he dreaded all of the house of David so much, that he ordered as many as could be found of the family of Christ to be sent to Rome for examination. He found them hard-working, humble men, whom he had no cause to fear, and he dismissed them.

Among those who suffered death, or were banished for the profession of christianity, were several relations of the sovereign himself; and probably nothing contributed more to the spread of these purer doctrines than the detestable vices of the emperors and their creatures; hateful to the pure-minded of whatever religious creed.* The contrast between the two could hardly fail to be seen and appreciated; and such had been the almost silent progress of the christian faith, that a little later we find Plinius embarrassed by the

* Julia Procilla, the mother of Agricola, of whose virtues Tacitus gives us so bright a picture, brought up her son at Marseille "*locum Græcæ comitate et provinciali parcimoniâ mistum*" in order to secure him from the contagious corruption of Rome. Marseille was founded by the inhabitants of Phokaia (Phocæa) in Asia Minor, when they fled from the vengeance of Cyrus.

numbers of its professors in the province of Bithynia, and applying to the emperor Trajanus for directions respecting them : all proceedings against them having been discontinued under the mild reign of Nerva.

The mockery of adoring as gods the licentious tyrants who had occupied the imperial throne, seems to have put an end to everything like religious feeling among the nations under the sway of Rome. The free satire of Lucianus * shows how completely it had faded away ; for it introduces the gods of Olympus, complaining that they were starved for lack

* It may be doubted, however, whether the mythology of the poets ever had any real hold on the feelings of the people. It has already been shown in No. xiv. that the peculiar deity of the city or country was usually some rude representation of the Divine power, as supposed to be, or to have been especially manifested in that particular spot. The object which had thus been sanctified, whether stone or tree, or image, was to that people, while the simplicity of ancient worship continued, the representative of the Deity ; hallowed in their eyes by peculiar circumstances, but not by any means identified with any of the gods of Olympus. It was a superstition rather than idolatry ; and when the nation was conquered, and its favourite representation of Deity transported to Rome in token of victory, it was no longer the same thing : it had lost its hold on the mind of the people, and indifference succeeded.

of offerings; not altogether because christian or philosophic doctrines prevailed widely; but rather on account of the total indifference of the people to their ancient mythology:* for even if it ever had symbolized the truth, its meaning was now forgotten; and even so far

* In LUCIAN'S dialogue, intituled *Timon*, Jupiter is thus addressed, "Oh Jupiter, where is now all thy crackling lightning, and thy deep toned thunder? Those unerring, far-shooting darts, so celebrated and sung by poets, have, I know not how, lost all their fire: they are grown quite cold, and preserve not the least spark for the punishment of the guilty . . . and now thou art well rewarded for thy indolence; for nobody sacrifices to thee, or offers thee garlands; except perhaps some person at the Olympic games, who does it, not because he thinks it a duty, but merely because it is an old custom."—In another dialogue between Jupiter, Juno, Mercurius, and Momus, Juno is made to ask her husband why he is low spirited? To this he replies,—"Juno, the affairs of the gods are in imminent danger: it is a moot point whether henceforth we are to be worshipped, and receive any honour from mortals, or to be totally neglected and despised."—He then goes on to tell of a disputation held publicly between a Stoic and an Epicurean, in which there was danger that the latter would gain the victory; in which case they would receive no more worship. He complains, furthermore, of one Mnesitheus, who had just offered a sacrifice, and "after inviting sixteen gods to his feast, killed only one cock, and that an old one, already half dead with disease;—adding only four grains of incense, which was so mouldy, and gave so little smoke that we could hardly smell it."

back as the time of Cicero, had become totally unintelligible to the learned, as well as to the multitude. It was useless therefore, and wanted but a slight impulse from without to overthrow it. But to the philosopher who was in earnest in his pursuit of this truth, buried under the rubbish of time, the doctrine of Christ afforded it: there he found all that the master minds whom he honoured had taught and hoped; but he found it simplified, purified, and confirmed by sanctions such as Plato had wished for, but scarcely dared to expect:—to the Roman patrician, if any there were who still looked back with fond memory to the purer morals and stern courage of his forefathers, the christian simplicity of manners and firm endurance of torture and death, was the realisation of what he had heard of and admired, but scarcely seen till then:—to the slave, sighing under oppression, and condemned to hopeless bondage, the doctrine of the gospel gave all that was valuable in life;—the christian slave was the friend of his christian master, partook of the same holy feast; shared the same painful but glorious martyrdom: he was raised at once to all his intellectual rank; found freedom beyond the grave, and lived

already in a happy immortality:—to the woman, degraded in her own eyes no less than in those of the tyrant to whose lusts she was the slave, it offered a restoration to all that is most dear to the human race: it offered intellectual dignity, equality before God, purity, holiness. The christian woman could die; she could not therefore, unless consenting to it, be again enslaved to the vile passions of men; before God she was free, and with HIM she trusted to find shelter when the hard world left her none. Can we wonder then that christianity found votaries wherever a mind existed that sighed after better things? for the preacher of Nazareth had at last expressed the thought which had been brooding in the minds of so many who had found themselves unable to give it utterance.

As the individual man has his bent, character, and object in life, so we always see that the human race, in the aggregate, has in every age its peculiar character and object which it follows with blind restlessness, till at last a man arises to give it shape and utterance: then the masses recognise the idea which had been rudely fashioned in their own minds, and embrace it with the eagerness of

men who suddenly find their thoughts cleared ; and are convinced, or think they are so,—that their wishes are attainable. Every age has seen this repeated ; for man seems unable, even yet, to see the whole of the Truth and Good which his Creator intended for him, and though upwards of eighteen hundred years have elapsed since that Truth and Good was propounded in the plainest possible terms, we still catch at only one or two phrases of the gracious Message, and too often mistake its meaning because we are too indolent or too enthusiastic to consider the whole.

We have seen enough of the manners of the heathen world : it now remains that I should give a short sketch, and it shall be from the pen of the scoffer,—of the conduct of the christian converts. In a letter from Lucianus to one Cronius, he gives the history of an impostor, called Peregrinus or Proteus, who seems to have deceived the christians of that time into a high opinion of his sanctity. The account of their habits thus incidentally given by the satirist is valuable ; for it is not that of a friend, and therefore cannot be suspected of partiality.

“ About this time it was,” says he, “ that

he (Peregrinus) learned the wonderful wisdom of the christians ; being intimately acquainted with their priests and scribes. In a very short time he convinced them that they were all boys to him ; became their prophet, their leader, their grand president, and in short all in all to them. He explained and interpreted many of their books, and wrote some himself ; insomuch that they looked upon him as their legislator and high priest ; nay, almost worshipped him as a god. Their leader, whom they yet adore, was crucified in Palestine for introducing this new sect. Proteus was on this account cast into prison, and this very circumstance was the foundation of all the consequence and reputation which he afterwards gained, and of that glory which he had always been so ambitious of ; for when he was in bonds, the christians, considering it as a calamity affecting the common cause, did everything in their power to release him, which, when they found impracticable, they paid him all possible deference and respect ; old women, widows, and orphans, were continually crowding to him, some of the most principal of them even remained with him in the prison, having bribed the keepers for

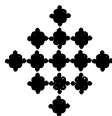
that purpose: there were varied suppers brought in to them; they read their sacred books together, and the noble Peregrinus, for so he was then called, was dignified by them with the title of the new Socrates. Several of the christian deputies from the cities of Asia, came to assist, to plead for, and to comfort him: it is incredible with what alacrity these people support and defend the public cause; they spare nothing in short, to promote it: Peregrinus being made a prisoner on their account, they collected money for him, and he made a very pretty revenue of it. These poor men, it seems, had persuaded themselves that they should be immortal, and live for ever. They despised death therefore, and offered up their lives a voluntary sacrifice, being taught by their lawgiver, that they were all brethren, and that, quitting our Grecian gods, they must worship their own sophist, who was crucified, and live in obedience to his laws. In compliance with them they looked with contempt on all worldly treasures, and held every thing in common, a maxim which they had adopted without any reason or foundation. If any cunning impostor, therefore, who knew how to manage

matters, came amongst them, he soon grew rich by imposing on the credulity of these weak and ignorant men."

To this may be added the well known testimony of Plinius, the friend of the emperor Trajanus; so well known indeed, that were this work written for the use of the learned, the quotation might have been spared. In writing to his imperial master for instructions as to his proceedings with regard to the christians who were become numerous in the province, he says that even those who had now totally renounced the profession of that faith, nevertheless, asserted constantly "that the sum of their crime or their error amounted only to this;—that they met together before it was light, and sung hymns alternately among themselves to Christ as God; that they bound themselves by an oath not to be guilty of any wickedness; not to steal nor to rob, not to commit adultery, nor break their plighted faith, nor to refuse to restore the deposits placed within their hands, when called on to do so: which done, it was their custom to depart, and meet again to take food together, of any innocent kind, without distinction."

These feasts were what were called by the christian writers *agapæ* :* in them the richer members of the community brought food and wine, and shared it with their poorer brethren. At a later period, Clement of Alexandria complains that these feasts were made luxurious, and temptations to excess. Probably such abuses led to their final disuse, which took place rather early.

* *Αγαπαί* from *αγαπή*, charity or christian benevolence. The *Agapæ* have been sometimes called *love feasts* by later writers, but this is hardly a correct translation of the word.





CHAPTER II.

SECOND CENTURY.

ROME, and under this term must be included the greater part of the civilised world, entered upon this century under new, and brighter auspices. Trajanus who succeeded his adoptive father Nerva, A. D. 97, was a consummate general, and possessed in addition many princely qualities. In comparison with most of his predecessors, he was virtuous; and the empire under his sway speedily rose to a greatness which it had never attained to before, and was extended by conquests which no hand less firm,—not even his own when enfeebled by age,—could retain. The reforms introduced by him in the administration were important and extensive, and had the state of society been less corrupt, the advantages of his reign might have been permanent: but the evil was already past remedy, and the downfall of the

Roman power was delayed only, not arrested by this great man and his immediate successors.

Circumstances had changed since the time when the citizen of Rome looked down on kings,—when the stern unity of purpose with which that fierce and haughty republic sought its own aggrandisement, under the title of patriotism, had given it a kind of dazzling grandeur which, even yet, we scarcely appreciate at its true value. The Emperor who swayed the destinies of Rome, was now no longer a native of that conquering state;* and the extent of territory acquired, and the fusion of various nations into one empire, had effectually taken away from the *subject* of the emperor, the pride and the ambition of the Roman citizen. The provinces pursued their own views and their own interests, and the proconsul who ruled over them was obliged to yield in some respects to their wishes, in order to retain the submission of countries so remote, so extensive, and so full of resources, that they were not always easy to manage. The unity of feeling was gone, and there was nothing to substitute in its place.

* Trajanus was a Spaniard.

True it is that the deities of the conquered states had generally been associated with the gods of Rome, with a considerable show of *politeness*;—can we hardly characterise it by any other word,*—but still each nation retained its own peculiarities, and there was no common bond in the religion they professed. The vices of the rulers had completely taken away all the respect for the name of Rome, which, when a Roman senator could neither be frightened nor bribed, had to a certain degree been felt, even by their enemies; and, when Trajanus assumed the government, the seeds of disunion were already too widely sown in the empire to be long prevented from germinating. Public virtue as it had been called;—that kind of feeling which made a Roman patrician think no sacrifice too grievous if it only secured the greatness of the republic;—which taught him to disdain riches, and shrink neither from hardships nor poverty, as long as he retained his self-esteem,—was at an end: the plebeian, the man of the soil, who only traced back his pedigree to his fore-

* Camillus is recorded to have asked the Juno of Veii whether she chose to be transported to Rome, and to have received an answer in the affirmative.

fathers who possessed that soil, not to the race who conquered it, now elbowed the patrician from his seat; and nothing like real virtue had been substituted to fill the gap which the checked pride of rank had left in the haughty breasts of the former masters of the state. Wealth became a title to greatness; ambition could be gratified by means of it, and the distant governor amassed unscrupulously the riches which would buy honours at his return. Nothing was left to appeal to:—the mythology of the time was no curb to any desire, however gross; philosophy made small progress among that rude warrior people, and when at last it did find listeners in Rome, it had lost its grandeur and its purity; and the Stoic, the Epicurean, the Platonist, &c., of a later period, had none of the spirituality which the first leaders of these sects had taught and fostered. The extreme licence of divorce had weakened the domestic affections, and children were exposed with very little compunction; for we find the emperor writing to his deputy and friend,* that the children of

* C. Cecilius Plinius Secundus, commonly called the younger Pliny, author of the well known letters which have come down to us.

free parents, who had been taken up when exposed, and brought up as slaves in the house of their preserver, might reclaim their freedom on proving their birth : the custom must have been a usual one, which required an especial law to regulate the relations arising out of it. Nay even the being childless was held to be a privilege ; for so many greedy expectants were ready to crowd round the heirless rich man, in the hope of securing a legacy to themselves, that this interested service was more prized than the dutiful attention of natural offspring. Plinius, in one of his letters, speaks in high praise of a friend, who, in an age when childlessness had so many advantages, was virtuous enough to have a numerous progeny. The religious rites at which females, even of the highest rank, assisted, were of a nature which effectually eradicated all purity of mind ; and if we may give credit to even a small part of the abominations which the satirists of that age speak of as common, very little of domestic virtue could be left in a country where the upper classes were so deeply tainted with the most degrading vices.

The universal sycophancy of the age showed

itself frequently in things merely ridiculous: thus, persons attended in the courts of law to sell their applause for a dole of meat, or a small sum of money; and advocates were found ready thus to purchase it. "Two or my servants, quite youths," writes Plinius to his friend Maximus, "were yesterday enticed to perform the part of applauders for the sum of three denarii. It is well that you should know what it will cost you to fill the benches with admirers."* But though this was ridiculed by Plinius, it is of ill augury for the age in which such practices are common; since where there is no respect for those holding place and power, the government at last becomes a nullity; especially in a country where no higher motive holds sway. Even the writer of these letters, amiable and upright as he seems to have been in much of his conduct, writes of the emperor in a strain of extravagant flattery, which no modern servant of the greatest monarch in christendom would venture on using.

The state of the lower classes had nothing in it which could at all brighten the prospect:

* PLINII *Ep.* lib. ii. ep. 14.

the small holders of land had in great measure disappeared; and the large proprietors employed slave-labour in their farms, no less than in the domestic services of the house; but these slaves were beyond the pale of the law;—incapable of giving testimony save under the torture,—incapable of inheriting property,*—and liable to stripes and imprisonment at the pleasure of their owner. Their state was ameliorated no doubt under a kind master; and the practice of frequent manumissions gave at least an opening for hope to this miserable class: but notwithstanding this, the larger portion of this part of the population of the ancient empires, remained in a state of brutish ignorance and demoralisation; as may be judged no less from the works of the ancient christian writers, who were seeking to raise them to a better feeling,† than from the ancient comedians, who describe them as they were. It has been already

* By the special favour of his master a slave could acquire property which was called his *peculium*; but this was a permission only, not a right.

† See *Small Books*, &c., No. vii. p. 52. The faults of manner which Clemens is endeavouring to amend show a state almost of barbarism.

noticed elsewhere that Aristoteles in treating of the duties and virtues of man doubted much if either slaves, women, or children, could be said to have any; though his logic was sorely puzzled to find out how the nature of man, which seemed common to all, could be changed by the accidental circumstance of slavery. The general treatment of these persons was proportioned to this opinion of the philosopher: they were driven to their work by stripes; they were punished for neglect in the same way; and being degraded by the law into mere animals, they became such. Plinius himself, who was so kind a master that he allowed his domestic slaves to acquire property, and make testamentary dispositions which he scrupulously observed,* complains that he obtained but negligent attendance from them, and rejoices at the visit of a friend whose presence might give them a motive for being more active.† Yet this man, kind hearted enough to shrink from employing the usual means of obtaining prompt service;—who attached himself so much to some of his atten-

* *PLINII Ep. lib. viii. Ep. 16.*

† *Ibid. lib. i. Ep. 4.*

dants, that he was miserable at the dangerous illness of his reader;*—when employed in a cause, had no scruple in allowing the torture to be applied in order to obtain the testimony of the domestic slaves; and when seeking to obtain information relating to the christian assemblies, in order to transmit it to the emperor, he himself ordered *two female* slaves† to be put to the torture: though indeed the phrase “quid esset veri et per tormenta quærere,” seems to show that he thought he had gone to the utmost limit of what he considered justifiable. Still he did it:—the practice was *ancient* and *legal*: and if his own heart did at all shrink from it, he never even suggested to the emperor,—so willing to listen to him,—that such a mode of obtaining testimony was an outrage on human nature:—it was ancient and legal, and that was enough to stifle all whispers of human feeling.

But while all that had given Rome the pre-eminence over the earlier empires was thus fading away, a fresh element had been infused into society: the faith of Christ

* PLINII *Ep.* lib. viii. *Ep.* 1.

† Probably employed as deaconesses.

with its pure morality, its lofty aspirations, its disdain of earthly grandeur, and its contempt for earthly perils, was gaining converts apace; and if we may judge of the rest of the Roman empire by the province of Bithynia, the number of its professors was great indeed. "This matter," writes Plinius to the emperor respecting the christians, "is becoming of importance from the numbers of the persons thus put in peril; for multitudes of all ages, all ranks, and even of both sexes, are and will be endangered if prosecuted; for this superstition has not pervaded the cities only: the contagion extends to the villages and fields."* In consequence, however, of the threats and intimidation which he had used to stop its progress, he adds, that "nearly all the temples which had lain desolate, were beginning to be opened again, the ceremonies which had been discontinued were resumed, and the victims, which before scarcely ever found a purchaser, were again brought up for sale." The fact that the temples and ceremonies of the state had been

* PLINII *Ep.* lib. x. *Ep.* 97.

neglected and forsaken, is sufficiently evident from these words; whether *wholly* in consequence of the spread of christianity may however be doubted: for, as has been noticed already, its way had been prepared by the general indifference of the people with regard to the old superstition.

The desertion of the temples, and the consequent cessation of the sacrifices which afforded so much relief to the poorer sort, naturally made the converts to the new faith unpopular among the commonalty. Their refusal to join in the ceremonies of the ancient ritual, and their absence from the usual festivals, caused them to be regarded as misanthropes; and the Jewish nation, among whom this faith had originated, being considered as at enmity with the Romans, ready at all times for revolt, and often engaged in open rebellion,—the christian societies were viewed with distrust and dislike by all orders. Their habit, too, of assembling once a week for worship, and their exclusion of all strangers from their celebration of the sacrament of the eucharist, and indeed generally from their more solemn meetings, at once

made them obnoxious to the penalties of the law against *Hetæriæ** or associations, and as these penalties were at the option of the condemning judge, the pro-consuls and governors of provinces were often mean enough to court the favour of the populace, and the priests who excited them, by delivering over the persons found guilty of thus assembling to all the severities which they had it in their power to order, and which a brutalized populace not unfrequently took pleasure in wit-

* Under the first Cæsars the law of treason (*crimen læsæ majestatis*) had been the fruitful source of sanguinary executions and confiscations of property: Trajanus so far limited its operation as to render it no longer a terror to good men. He banished those who had exercised the trade of informers, and would allow of no arrests upon mere suspicion: but in order to curb the licence which this relaxation of the *lex majestatis* might have given rise to, he was strict in his decree against all associations (*Hetæriæ*) to the point of prohibiting the formation of a company of artificers at Nicomedia, where Plinius had advised this measure as a security against future fires; for this city had been devastated by a fire which spread in consequence of the want of any implements, or persons to use them, by which its progress might have been arrested. V. PLIN. *Ep.* lib. x. *Ep.* 42. The reason given by the emperor for his refusal to license the formation of this company was, that such associations had been frequently made a cover for conspiracies against the government.

nessing, or even inflicting. The sycophancy become so general among the once proud Romans, readily caught at any opportunity of evincing peculiar zeal in carrying into execution the will of the reigning emperor, and thus the decree of Trajanus against private associations was no sooner known than informations became abundant; and Plinius, on arriving in Bithynia, was alarmed at the number of executions which would have been requisite had the law been strictly enforced.

The decision of Trajanus that informations should be discouraged, and that the christians should not be *sought* for, was probably as great a relaxation of the decree as he thought it safe to grant; their obstinacy in continuing to contravene the law, and in openly avowing and glorying in it when brought before the tribunals, he must have considered as a contumacy worthy of severe punishment; and the general, accustomed to the enforcement of military discipline could ill brook a system, which he might naturally enough argue, would be an *imperium in imperio* dangerous to the state, if suffered to take firm root among the people. The abstract truth of the faith probably engaged very little of his at-

tention;—a victorious general is not often a philosopher or a theologian;—but he could not well believe in the loyalty of subjects who began by breaking the law, and avowed their determination to continue in that practice. The whole of his conduct, therefore, with regard to the christians, appears rather to have been a part of this emperor's general plan for repressing the disorders in the empire, which the misgovernment of his predecessors had given rise to, than any fanatical attempt to compel the adoption of a particular faith. The law was to be enforced; and the conqueror of the Dacians was not the man to shrink from severity, when he thought that the good order of the state required it. It is indeed probable that most of the persecutions of the christians arose more out of a misunderstanding of their worship and conduct, than from any enmity against their real doctrines; with which scarcely any but the professors of them were at that time acquainted.* Nero had but sought to throw

* The anonymous account of the martyrdom of Ignatius makes Trajanus himself condemn the bishop of Antioch to the beasts, but it is to be observed that the dates given are at variance with each other, and the cir-

the blame of his own crime on others when he found himself likely to be endangered by the general indignation which it had caused, and accused the christians of setting fire to the city in order to shelter himself;—Domitianus was timid, and dreaded a revolt of the Jews, of whom he considered the christians to be a sect;—Trajanus wished to strengthen the hands of the government, and put a stop to all illegal meetings. In each case, the unflinching resolution of the converts to the new faith exposed them to the full danger resulting from either the cruelty or the policy of the reigning sovereign.

Among the earlier nations of antiquity the system of government, like that of China even now, was an imitation of that of a great family, of which the sovereign represented the head. While the habits of the people were simple, the allegiance to the monarch

cumstances not sufficiently consistent with probability to give any great authority to this document. The fact that Ignatius was sent to Rome to be delivered to the beasts in the amphitheatre, is made certain by his own epistles; but neither he, in these epistles, nor Eusebius in his history, makes any mention of a personal interview between him and the emperor.

was that of personal attachment, and that sufficed: but when the vices and oppression of the rulers alienated this affection, the people had no motive to bind them to one system of government more than another, and these empires fell an easy prey to the first invader strong enough to vanquish the mercenary force brought against him: the *people*, properly so called, took no share in the contest. When laws, enacted by the people themselves, or, at least, adopted by them, took the place of the arbitrary dicta of the rulers, there grew out of the privileges enjoyed by the inhabitants of the free states of Greece and afterwards of Rome, a feeling of attachment to the country in which they were enjoyed: the attachment to the parent head of the state was transferred to the parent land which gave them advantages not to be found elsewhere, and patriotism became the guiding motive. A Greek or a Roman looked with contempt on other nations; and while ready to sacrifice his fortune, his children, and himself, for his country, gave himself no concern about any not born in that favoured land; and considered such persons in very much the same point of view as Europeans did the

natives of Africa a century ago :—as a nursery of slaves for those whose superior power enabled them to seize on them. But patriotism was but a modification of selfishness ; and, as a plant which by careful culture has been forced into a size and splendour not natural to it, soon degenerates, and loses its acquired colours and beauty,—so selfishness, in any form, soon degenerates into its primitive type of mere self gratification. Romans had sacrificed other nations to their cupidity as a people, they had now an empire made up of such incongruous parts that all unity of purpose was lost : individuals were now sacrificed to individual cupidity, and society was fast returning to its first elements : the government of law was at an end, and the sword decided all.

It was evident that new and more universal motives were needed to carry the masses of mankind forward from barbarism to civilisation, and these were afforded by christianity, which, after the first century, must be reckoned as one of the chief agents in all the events of the world : for, though large portions of the globe have never embraced that faith, their fate has nevertheless been greatly

influenced by those nations which did; and upon the more or less enlightened view taken of their duties by its professors, have depended the chief of the events of great importance which have occurred since its promulgation. This may seem a large assertion; but it will become evident in the sequel. Even its first preaching had its influence; for the fables of the heathens were too absurd, and their ~~rights~~^{rites} too gross to be justified when boldly held up to ridicule or abhorrence: the oracles wisely became silent;* —the fables were explained away into allegories; and the rites, if not reformed, were at least less attended, as is evident from the writings of Lucianus, already quoted. Even the laws and customs of Rome underwent a great change for the better; for we are told† that Adrianus prohibited the promiscuous use of the public baths by the two sexes, and enacted that if a master was killed by his slaves the whole of them should not be put to death, but that such only of them as were

* Plutarch has a treatise on the causes of the cessation of oracles. He lived in the time of Adrianus, and therefore a competent witness of the fact.

† v. *Ælii Spartiani. Adrianus. Imp. c. 18.*

near enough to have prevented the murder, should be tortured. No master was in future to have the power of life and death, but crimes committed by slaves were to be taken cognisance of before the magistrates, as in the case of freemen. He likewise prohibited human sacrifices, which, even so late as the reign of Trajanus, had been allowed; for Plutarch informs us that a criminal intercourse having been discovered between three vestals and several of the equestrian order, besides the punishment of the criminals, the pontiffs required two men and two women, natives of Greece and Gaul, to be buried alive in the Forum Boarium by way of expiation!*

The history of christianity is in fact the history of mankind; for as we well know that the educated and civilised man is the proper type of the race, and that the barbarian, if instructed from his birth, could and would arrive at the same point; so the *christianized*, but not yet thoroughly *christian* nations of Europe are but the vanguard of the great host of mankind on its march towards civi-

* PLUT. *Questiones Romanæ*. lxiii.

lisation, and will and must be followed by the rest. Let it not be thought therefore that by affording so large a notice to the progress of christianity I am deviating from my plan: it is one of those great systems which, more formed for extension than that of Egypt, more aggressive than that of Greece, *must* influence, and ultimately involve the fate of the whole world.

Rome was as yet nominally heathen: the decree of Trajanus against Hæterixæ, though moderated by his order that the christians should not be sought for, though they were to be punished when convicted, left an opening for informations, and imposed a necessity on the magistrates before whom they were laid, to award punishment when the case was clear. This was taken advantage of by the parties to whom the progress of the new sect was in any way hurtful;* and we find the most distinguished among its professors† beginning

* The example of the tumult at Ephesus which might have had serious consequences but for the prudence of the Præfect, may show us how such things happen. There were many tradesmen, &c. employed like Demetrius in lucrative business by the superstitions of the time.

† Quadratus and Aristides. Their works are lost.

to present memorials to the emperors in justification of themselves and their people, in the reign of Adrianus, when, after the death of Trajanus, informations against them were multiplied. The proconsuls themselves, moved by the undeserved sufferings of the christians, seemed to have applied for orders to Adrianus, in the same way as Plinius sought the directions of Trajanus, and the letter of the emperor on this subject to Minucius Fundanus is still preserved to us,* by which it

* Doubts have been entertained by some critics as to the genuineness of this letter; but, at the time when such a rescript might have been useful, a supposititious one could not have been brought forward without detection; and afterwards, when the number of its martyrs formed the glory of the church, and its chief literature consisted in the details of their sufferings, there was no motive for such a forgery. Add to which, that Hadrian's attempts to conciliate the good will of all the religious sects in his dominions, and his philosophic pretensions, render such a rescript highly probable, if, as in the reign of his predecessor, a governor of a province applied to him for instructions in this matter. The bold tone of subsequent apologists proves that they had no apprehension that their cause would be injured by being brought before the emperor;—on the contrary, they seem to have believed that the outrages perpetrated against the christians were without the consent or knowledge of the highest authority in the state. In fact, excepting the law against secret societies, there was none under which the

appears that the proceedings against the christians hitherto, had been the work of a tumultuous populace, rather than by any means that of the organs of the government.*

Nevertheless a slight matter sufficed to give a colour for proceedings against them; and though the tolerant views of the emperor were well known, we find that the same remonstrances on the part of the christians became necessary in the next reign,—that of Antoninus Pius. In order to have a pretext for prosecuting them without incurring the danger of appearing to contravene the rescript of Adrianus, they were

followers of Christ could be found guilty. Decius was the first emperor who enacted penalties against the christians as christians; and even then it was because he dreaded them as partisans of a political faction, rather than from any special objection to their faith.

* Adrianus is reported by *Ælius Lampridius* to have had at one time the intention of building a temple to Christ: and to have actually caused temples to be built in all cities in which no image of the Deity was permitted to be set up. "The temples thus constructed," he adds, "being found without any presiding god, were called those of Adrianus, their purpose, however, was never carried out, those who had the care of holy things insisting that if this was the case the whole population would shortly be christians."—*ÆL. LAMP. Alex. Sever.* c. 43.

now accused of various crimes, which were said to be perpetrated in their secret assemblies; and the apologies, as they are called, which were for this reason presented to the emperors in the course of this and the following century, have many of them reached us. Among these, one of the most remarkable is that delivered in by Justinus, formerly a Platonic philosopher, but afterwards converted to christianity. It produced a fresh decree in favour of the christians on the part of Antoninus; by which the mere profession of christianity was not allowed to be considered as a crime; and those who accused the christians frivolously, were rendered amenable to severe punishment. This produced a respite from ill usage, and there does not appear to have been any further attempt made to molest the christians till the reign of his successor, Marcus Aurelius, who assumed the purple about A.D. 161. The attacks on the christians were then renewed, and renewed generally with impunity; but as Tertullianus denies that any *edict* against them had been promulgated at this time, it would seem rather to have been a permission than a positive injunction to the provincial and urban gover-

nors, to cause the christians to comply with the ordinary state ceremonies. This permission, however, when the parties were already beginning to feel that it was a struggle for existence, was enough to give rise to many sanguinary scenes, where the prejudices of the local magistrates could be excited to action. The christians, already a powerful body, did not submit without remonstrance to this change, and their appeals to the emperor and senate are couched in terms which, though moderate, are firm, and have the air of being the complaint of a body already numerous and powerful enough to claim some merit for their submission, when thus exposed to plunder and ill usage.

Melito, bishop of Sardis, who presented an apology to the emperor, which is in part preserved by Eusebius, appears himself to doubt whether the decrees enforced against them were actually those of the emperor. "By these decrees," he says, "pious persons throughout Asia have been delivered over into the hands of impudent informers, covetous of other men's goods, who, in consequence of the occasion thus given, have openly plundered and maltreated persons who had committed

no crime: and if," he adds, "these decrees, which are more cruel than any found among barbarians, and cannot be those of a just prince, have not emanated from the sovereign, we entreat that our case may be considered, and a stop put to such shameful injustice. The philosophy which we have embraced," he continues, "is not new; it has existed since the time of Augustus; with the exception of Nero and Domitianus, the Roman emperors always treated it with peculiar respect: and so far from being a cause of evil to the empire, the prosperity of this latter has on the contrary gone on increasing *pari passu* with that of christianity."

Justinus too—usually known as Justin Martyr—delivered in a second apology addressed to the senate and people of Rome, an account of the wrongful execution of some christians.*

* The circumstances, as detailed by himself, which gave rise to the second apology, (often placed *first* in editions of his works,) give so good an idea of the mode in which the christians were often sufferers, even without any imperial decree, that I shall here give a brief account of them.

A certain woman, it appears, who, as well as her husband, had led a life of extreme licentiousness, em-

The new emperor, Marcus Aurelius, was much devoted to the study of philosophy, and

braced the christian faith; reformed her conduct, and endeavoured to persuade her husband to do the same; but failing in her endeavour, and disgusted by his vices, she wished to part from him. This was, for a time, prevented by her relations, but finally, he having been to Alexandria, and there abandoned himself to even greater excesses than before, she again sought a separation, and sent him a writ of repudiation; whereupon he tendered an accusation against her to the emperor, that she was a christian. The woman, on being cited, asked leave to defend herself; and on her justification being heard, she was set free. The husband then turned his spite against one Ptolomæus, who had been instrumental to his wife's conversion, and by some false accusation contrived to bring about his imprisonment. He next persuaded the centurion (a friend of his) by whom Ptolomæus was arrested,—only to examine the prisoner as to whether he was a christian, which, of course, he boldly confessed. He was then brought up before Urbicius, the præfect of the city, before whom he made the same avowal; and was by him ordered to be led away to execution; when a certain Lucius who was present, a christian also, complained aloud of the injustice done to the accused, who was not proved guilty of any crime, and addressing Urbicius, told him he was acting in a manner unworthy of the deputy of an emperor and a philosopher; and against the law. To this Urbicius only replied by asking if he too was a christian, and on his avowing it, sent him away to execution along with Ptolomæus. Eusebius, who mentions the circumstance, adds that a third stepped forward with a like avowal, and suffered with them.

Here it is evident that private pique, and an inefficient

appears to have encouraged men of all sects, though he himself leaned chiefly to the Stoics; but the philosophers of his time were no longer what they had been at an earlier period: christianity had drawn within its pale almost all the professors of philosophy who were really seekers of truth; and the remainder, vain and licentious in their conduct, and nevertheless confident in the general protection of the emperor, soon became the most bitter enemies of those whom they considered as renegades. Among these pseudo-philosophers was one Crescens, professing himself a Cynic, whose unblushing vices had called down on him the severe animadversions of both Justinus and his disciples. This man, provoked at finding himself both worsted in point of argument, and held up to public scorn as an abandoned libertine, spared no

method of administering the laws, were the causes of the evil; for the woman who was heard before the emperor, and who equally avowed herself a christian, was acquitted.

According to Bede and others, Britain also received christianity about this time, and enjoyed the exercise of that religion without any molestation from the Roman authorities till the time of Diocletianus.—BEDÆ, *Hist. Ecc. lib. i. c. 4.*

pains to rid himself of so troublesome an adversary. Justinus was brought before the præfect of the city on some pretence, and as the report of his examination bears all the marks of truth, and may probably be taken as a specimen of the mode in which the christians were then dealt with, it may be well to give a portion of it here.* The præfect of the city is here named Rusticus; and as a man of rank, so named, was the emperor's instructor in the Stoic philosophy, it is by many supposed that it was the same person.

Rusticus. First of all sacrifice to the gods, and do homage to the emperors.

Justinus. He who obeys Christ is guilty of no crime, (meaning that he ought to be discharged without further process.)

R. Of what sect do you profess yourself?

* It must have been a second examination, as no names are demanded. In the first, probably, no crime was substantiated, and Justinus avails himself of this, by insisting, as is seen farther on, that the mere fact of his belief was not a crime. This time the præfect begins artfully,—probably upon the prompting of Crescens, who according to Eusebius was the cause of his arrest,—and endeavours to make Justinus guilty of contumacy, by requiring of him as a preliminary, what he knew a christian could not comply with.

(Justinus was in the habit of wearing the philosopher's cloak even after his conversion.)

J. I tried all, and finally embraced that of Christ: though that is not pleasing to those who profess what is erroneous.

R. Do you profess that doctrine, unfortunate man?

J. Yes, for it seems to me that it is true.

R. What is the doctrine?

J. That we should worship the God of the christians, whom we believe to have been from the beginning, One; the Creator and Artificer of all things seen and unseen: and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God; who was predicted of by the prophets, as the future Saviour of mankind, their preacher, and instructor in excellent doctrine: but I, being a man, can say but little of his infinite divinity: that being only to be known by prophetic power. For the prophets told long before of Him whom I said to be the Son of God, and of His presence on earth among men.

R. Where do you assemble?*

J. Wherever any one chooses. Do you

* The law against Hæresis was still in force.

suppose that we all meet in one place?—Far from it. As the God of the christians is un-circumscribed, and invisibly fills the heavens and the earth, His faithful worshippers render Him praise and homage everywhere.

R. Tell me where you assemble, and in what place your disciples are collected.

J. I live just above a certain Martinus, . . . and up to this time I know of no place of meeting but that. If any one chooses to come to me I impart to him the doctrine of truth.

R. Are you not, after all, a christian, then?

J. Certainly; I am a christian.

Rusticus then addressed himself to the companions of Justinus, who appear to have been arrested at the same time, and who all in turn avowed themselves to be christians. After this, he again addressed Justinus thus: "Listen to me, wise man;—you who think you know the doctrine of truth;—if you are scourged from head to foot, do you suppose you shall then ascend into the heavens?

J. I hope to have the promise if I endure these things, for I know that all who so live will participate in the divine gift, until the consummation of all things.

R. Do you imagine when you ascend into the heavens that some recompense will be awarded you?

J. I do not *imagine*;—I believe, nay, am certain of it.

R. It remains that we return to the business before us. Come all of you then, and offer incense to the gods with one accord.

J. No right minded man falls from piety to impiety . . .*

R. If you do not obey I shall punish you without mercy.

J. “We give thanks to our Lord Jesus Christ that we, through suffering, shall be saved:—for this will be to us salvation, and freedom before the dread tribunal of our Lord and Saviour.” And thus also spoke the other martyrs, saying, “Do what you will with us; we are christians, and will not offer incense to idols.” Hereupon Rusticus, the præfect, pronounced the sentence. “Those who will not offer incense to the gods, nor obey the decree of the emperor, having been scourged, shall be

* The christians were accused of atheism and impiety; Justinus seems to have been addressing himself to the refuting this false opinion, but was cut short by the hasty interruption of the præfect.

led away and punished capitally, according to the tenor of the law."

It is here evident that the præfect was seeking to show that Justinus and his disciples were guilty under the law against *Hetæriæ*: when foiled in this by the wary answers of Justinus, he calls suddenly for a preliminary ceremony, in which it was well known that the christians would not join, and condemns them summarily for disobedience. Had there been any especial decree of the emperor against the christians, the first answers to the interrogatory would have been a sufficient cause for condemnation. It is clear, however, from the tenor of all the remonstrances of the christians, that these violent proceedings were, at any rate, not repressed by the emperor. In his writings he speaks of them as obstinate men, who had a pride in dying: unlike the true philosopher, who met death gravely, and with decorum. An opinion taken up probably from the pseudo-philosophers by whom he was surrounded; for Socrates met his fate with a smile on his countenance and a jest on his lips; and Anaxagoras, when asked by the magistrates of Lampsacus if he had any dying request

to make, asked for a holiday for the children on the anniversary of his death, as a token of rejoicing at his translation to his true country. But these were precursors of Christ, virtuous themselves, and preachers of virtue to others. It has already been seen that philosophy had now changed its tone.

The impunity with which these attacks on the innocent christians had been carried on, gave courage to the other party, and the people were excited at their public games and assemblies, to vociferate "the christians to the lions"—and too often these tumultuous cries were successful. It was thus that Polycarpus, the disciple of John the Apostle, and now at a very advanced age, was called for by a brutal populace; and, after a very slight attempt to save him on the part of the Roman functionaries,* was abandoned to the blind rage of the people.

* After questioning him as to his name &c. the proconsul entreated him to have regard to his reverend age, and comply with the customary ceremonies. "Swear by the fortune of Cæsar," he continued, "and say, take away the impious." Polycarpus, looking sadly around him, and extending his hand towards the crowd, said, raising his eyes to heaven, "Take away the impious."—Then said the proconsul—"Swear, and I will dismiss

These eminent persons were put to death without any show of legality; for the rescripts of the emperors had the force of laws, and

you — Blaspheme the Christ.” — “Eighty-six years,” replied the venerable man, “I have been His bondman, and He was never unjust to me; how then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?” After some further speech, the proconsul said, — “I have fierce beasts and I will cast thee to them,” — and this failing to shake his resolution, he threatened burning, but with as little effect; on which the proconsul, astonished at his courage, and probably unwilling himself to condemn a venerable old man innocent of any crime, sent the cryer to proclaim three times in the stadium “Polycarpus avows himself a christian.” — The whole multitude there assembled, upon this vociferated the more, crying, “This is the father of the christians; the teacher of impiety; the contemner of our gods; who teaches men not to worship and not to sacrifice;” — and thereupon they clamoured to Philippus the governor of Asia, who was there, that he should bring out a lion against Polycarpus. This however the governor refused, on the ground that the games were over, and that it was not lawful to expose any more persons in the amphitheatre. The multitude then clamoured to burn Polycarpus alive, and no effectual measures being taken to prevent it, the mad populace tore up benches &c. from the workshops, and proceeded themselves to execute their will; but the flames being blown aside by the wind so that he remained nearly unhurt, he was finally stabbed.

The story is told in a letter to the other churches, said to be written by the christians of the church of Smyrna, of which Polycarpus was bishop; and which is quoted by Eusebius as genuine.

those of Adrianus and of Antoninus Pius enjoining that the christians should not be subjected to any penalty for their faith merely, but only for substantiated crimes, were still unrepealed. We find, in fact, that these rescripts were appealed to by the christian remonstrants, and the next record that we have, therefore, of an attack on the christian community by the other party,* shows that an accusation was sought, by which the proceedings could be justified. The christians of Vienne, in Gaul, appear to have been rich, and many of them of noble birth: of course the sacrifices and festivals were diminished by their secession very greatly. A tumult seems, as usual, to have been excited against them, and the governor (thus it would seem from the sequel) not having chosen to incur the responsibility of abandoning persons guilty of no crime to an infuriated mob, those who were urging on the tumult called for the examination of their domestic slaves.† These

* A. D. 177.

† A plaintiff when unable otherwise to substantiate his charge was allowed to pay into court the value of the slaves called for, and thereupon they were subjected to the torture, and thus interrogated. The interrogation

slaves were heathens: rather than endure the torture, they confessed whatever was suggested to them, and thus charges of wholesale murder and incest were supposed to be substantiated. The governor no longer withheld his consent, and during many days a scene of horror was enacted in that city which has, we will hope, no parallel in modern times.

Some of the accused being Roman citizens, the governor wrote to the emperor for his directions; sending, no doubt, at the same time the result of the interrogatory. The

of the slaves would not have been called for could any crime have been proved without this process; or had the governor chosen to proceed without proof. That this was the law of Rome near about this time, will be found from some of Plinius's letters.

The authenticity of the letter from the christians of Vienne and Lyon quoted by Eusebius, has been doubted by some: but all that is described there accords so well with the then state of the law, and the details given in other christian writings of similar popular outbreaks; that if it be an invention, it must have been a very clever and a very early one: too early to have been without a foundation in truth, even if it were not the very work of the survivors. The accusations against the christians are exactly those which called forth the indignant remonstrances of Athenagoras and Tertullianus: the popular outrages much of the same description as those endured by Polycarpus, whom the Roman governor so feebly endeavoured to save.

answer was, that such as confessed themselves christians should be put to death. The repeated tortures to which the arrested persons were subjected, formed, however, no part of the rescript: these must be imputed altogether to the brutality of both governor and people; for had either possessed the least particle of human feeling, it would have been impossible to have stood by to behold women, youths, and venerable old men thus treated. Pothinus, bishop of Lyons, was at this time above 90 years of age: too infirm to walk, he was carried into court by the military guard, followed by the magistrates of the city, and the populace. When asked by the governor who was the God of the christians, he answered, "If thou wert worthy thou wouldst know." Upon which he was dragged away without any regard to his age and infirmity; wounded, struck, and kicked by those nearest to him, and finally cast into prison more dead than alive, where he expired two days after. He was succeeded in his bishopric by Irenæus the disciple of Polycarpus.

The tumults at this place seem to have subsided as the concourse brought together by the games dispersed; for it was among the

runder and more ignorant people from the country, that the idol priesthood had the most influence; but the maltreatment of the christians at this time was very general, as we may gather from the remonstrance addressed to this same emperor by Athenagoras, an Athenian;—formerly, like Justinus, a Platonic philosopher. He begins by enumerating all the strange and ridiculous superstitions which prevailed among different nations subjected to the Roman power, but which were nevertheless tolerated, partly because it was thought bad that any should live without acknowledging a Deity; partly because it was necessary that those who acknowledged any God should be allowed to pray to him in their own way. “All this,” says he, “is permitted, but the very name of christian is hated: yet surely not names, but crimes deserve punishment. All the empire under your merciful reign enjoys protection and peace; we alone derive no advantage from your care. We are innocent of any crime, yet we are robbed, ill-treated, driven from our homes, and all for a name. We do not,” he adds, “complain merely of being plundered of our worldly goods; our reputation is taken away by the most un-

founded calumnies, and our very lives are at hazard: it ill accords with your character for justice and lenity to suffer such things to be inflicted, unless for proved crimes. We therefore implore you that we may not be hated and punished merely because we are called christians: for no one who is truly a christian can be a bad man." He then notices the three charges brought against them of atheism, cannibalism and incestuous connexions, and denies and refutes them: concluding with the reiterated request that while their lives were blameless, they might be allowed to live unharmed under the rule of a sovereign for whose well being they constantly prayed.

No doubt exists that Marcus Aurelius was a just, wise, and well-intentioned prince; it has been therefore a matter of some surprise to many, that he should have given room for such a complaint: but the christians were not the only sufferers from an easiness of temper which amounted almost to a vice. The provincial governors presumed upon it to oppress the people,* and his own family disgraced

* See the account of his conduct towards Herodes Atticus.

him by their vices, which, though he did not share in, he winked at.* We must however reckon the four reigns which occupied the larger part of the century as a period of progress and civilisation; and one of the greatest steps in advance probably was, the prohibition of bloodshed in the gladiatorial shows, enforced by this emperor. The combatants were required by him to fight with foils instead of sharp weapons. But nevertheless the demoralising influence of a religion to which he himself gave the last finish of ridicule by insisting on the deification of his debauched and tyrannical colleague Verus, and his own dissolute wife Faustina, was felt to the very confines of the empire: nowhere but among the christians was there any remnant of decency, and the moment that the personal character of Marcus Aurelius ceased to influence the age, the canker of society became apparent. The reign of Commodus, by relaxing the strictness of military discipline, destroyed the last safeguard of Rome, the empire was put up to sale by a mutinous

* The emperor Julian in his *Cæsars* blames him for this, and very deservedly.

soldiery, and bought only as the means of indulging personal ambition or sensuality. It fell at last into firmer, but not more scrupulous hands. The close of the second century saw Septimius Severus invested with the purple: and although he commenced his reign with a cruelty which was not inferior to that of Marius or Sylla, he corrected some of the abuses which his immediate predecessors had countenanced, and reduced the mutinous legions to something like obedience: but the age was beyond his management.

On all sides the barbarous nations which surrounded the Roman empire were pressing upon the frontiers in all their native fierceness;—careless of life, and bent on plunder; while the military and their commanders, alike enervated by dissipation, were ill able to cope with them. It was easy, even then, to see that the edifice of the Roman power was tottering, and the next century made it yet more apparent. Along the banks of the Danube the nations inhabiting the other side were with difficulty restrained from invading the Roman province: in the east the Parthians and other warlike tribes resisted, very often successfully, the Roman arms. In

Britain the Caledonians, in the north of Europe the Teutonic tribes, waited only a weaker reign to repeat their incursions, and everywhere hordes of undisciplined but hardy warriors stood ready to take the first opportunity of enriching themselves by the plunder of the fertile provinces of Rome.

The impending danger did not produce union: the evils of the empire were imputed to the christians by the ignorant rabble, spurred on, probably, by all who, like Demetrius the silversmith, suffered in their trades by the spread of the new doctrine. At last the emperor appears to have issued a rescript forbidding any from embracing in future either Judaism or christianity;—intending probably to confine the enactment to the new converts, for he kept some about his own person who made no secret of their faith.* The people, however, and such governors of provinces as courted popularity, continued at different places to pursue the christians with inveterate hatred, which, when multitudes were brought together on any great festival, on which occasions the country people from

* TERTULL. *ad Scapulam*. c. 4.

all the surrounding region were wont to flock in, showed itself in cries of "the christians to the lions."

These attacks called forth a yet sterner apologist in the person of Q. Septimius Florens Tertullianus, the son of a centurion of noble birth in the army of the proconsul of Africa. He was born at Carthage, and brought up a heathen; but afterwards embraced the christian faith; and when the cruelties exercised upon those who professed it were renewed, he took up the defence of his fellow believers in a remonstrance which has reached our times. He launches a variety of keen sarcasms against the superstitions of their adversaries, and the inconsistency of the processes by which the christians were condemned; repels with stern indignation the false charges brought against them, and asserts their innocence in the tone of a man who speaks in the name of a body too numerous to be condemned.* His apology was made public about

* "If, as I said above, we are commanded to love our enemies, whom have we to hate?" (the christians were accused of being man haters) . . . "consider the thing. How many times have you cruelly attacked the christians, partly of your own choice, partly in obedience to the

the end of this century, and was dedicated to the Roman magistrates, and especially the senate of Rome. He addressed another to Scapula, the proconsul of Africa, in a tone of no less boldness, warning him *μη θεομαχειν*, not to fight against God.

laws. How many times have our enemies among the vulgar people, making no account of you,—attacked us with fire and stones of their own will? During the fury of the Bacchanalia they do not spare even the corpses of the christians; tearing them from the sacred quiet of the sepulchre, the asylum of the dead. . . . If we were inclined to vindicate our cause by force, would numbers and armies be wanting to us? . . . We are of yesterday, and yet we fill every place; your cities, your senatorial houses, your villages, your municipia, your councils, your very camps, tribes, decuria; the imperial palace, the senate, the forum; alone we leave you your temples. . . . For what war would men be unfit, even with inferior numbers, who can thus boldly suffer, were it not a law among us rather to be killed than to kill. Even unarmed,—not rebels, but merely seceding,—we could fight against you by merely separating from you. There is no doubt that you would then be frightened at your solitude, at the silence and death, as it were, of the empire; you would have to seek men over whom to reign; for more enemies than citizens would remain to you.”—TERTULL. *Apol.* c. 37.





CHAPTER III.

EARLY CHRISTIAN RITES AND DOCTRINE.

IT is now needful to pause for a short time in the survey of the state of man after the promulgation of the gospel, to examine what that religion or that philosophy was, which within little more than one hundred and fifty years from the time when its first preachers went forth to their labour of love, had won for itself such a numerous body of converts as to justify the boast that there would be few left to rule over if the christians were banished.*

Of late we have disclaimed philosophy as

* Tertullianus thus addresses Scapula, the proconsul of Africa—"When Arrius Antoninus undertook to prosecute the christians, all of that persuasion immediately presented themselves before his tribunal. Then he, after ordering a few for execution, said to the rest—'Wretched people, if you wish to die there are precipices and ropes enough to be had.'—If thou wert inclined to do this here, how wouldst thou dispose of so many thousands, as well men as women, persons of both

if it were at variance with the gospel: not so its early preachers: *they* appealed to reason, and showed that every system but theirs had its follies and inconsistencies: *they* sedulously insisted on *their* philosophy as the only true and complete system, and showed the conformity between it and the noblest speculations of the Grecian sages: *they* only asked for a hearing because their doctrine would bear the test of examination and argument, and because their own lives showed that they believed it. "If any one be a criminal," says Athenagoras, "he is no christian, for our law

sexes, of all ages, of all ranks, presenting themselves to thee? How many fires, how many swords wouldst thou need? What would Carthage herself,—now about to be decimated by thee,—have to endure, when every one should see among the sufferers his relations and friends? when he might see there perhaps, and by thy order, dignified men and matrons, and all the principal persons of the city, the relations and friends even of thy own friends? Spare therefore thyself if not us; spare Carthage if not thyself! . . . Finally, those whom thou considerest as thy masters are men, and they too will die: but this sect will not diminish, which thou now knowest is but increased when it seems to be in the course of being extirpated. For whoever sees so much fortitude is tempted to enquire into the cause, and when he sees the truth he himself quickly embraces it."—
TERT. *ad Scapulam*. c. 5.

forbids such conduct,"*—and so says also Justinus in the apology he presented to the emperor Antoninus Pius and his colleagues; adding that the doctrine of Socrates and Plato was almost that of Christ; and that those who permitted the one to be taught, had no right to object to the other.

It would be needless here to enlarge on the doctrines taught in the writings of the apostles and evangelists: they are sufficiently before the world, and in the hands of all. But the writings of their immediate successors are less known; and now, when the philosophy of Christ has nearly superseded all other systems, it is important that we should know how those who lived so near the time, understood the doctrine which they had almost personally received from its first teachers: that we should see whether or not it has undergone alteration in after ages, and what those alterations, if any, have been: finally, that we should know WHAT we believe and WHY: and as a first step towards this, I shall endeavour to show WHAT the witnesses to the truth of the first and second centuries

* ATHENAG. *Legatio pro Christianis*.

answered to their heathen opponents, and WHY these heathen opponents were convinced.

The only genuine writings remaining to us of the first century, besides those of the apostles and evangelists, are so very similar in both matter and manner to those of the new testament, that I shall not quote at all from the epistle of Clemens Romanus to the Corinthians, and from those of Ignatius* merely the testimony that in his time the proper government of the churches was vested in bishops, priests, and deacons.† Up to the end of the first century the christians had not been opposed by any arguments, and were merely treated according to the caprice of the reigning emperor, or by Trajan's law convicted of assembling unlawfully. But in the second century precise charges were made against them, and arguments brought forward which their apolo-

* The ancient Syrian version lately discovered is supposed to have put us in possession of the genuine epistles.

† τῷ ἐπισκόπῳ προσέχετε ἵνα καὶ ὁ Θεὸς ὑμῖν. Ἀντίψυχον ἐγὼ τῶν ὑποτασσομένων τῷ ἐπισκόπῳ, πρεσβυτέροις, διακόνοις μετ' αὐτῶν μοι τὸ μέρος γίνωιτο σχεῖν ἐν Σεφ.—IGNAT. *Ep. ad Polykarpum*.

“Have regard for the bishop in order that God may have regard to you. I pledge my soul for those who submit themselves to the bishop, the presbyters and the deacons: may my part be with theirs in the Lord.”

gists or remonstrants rather, considered and undertook to confute.

"When Socrates," says Justinus, "with true wisdom* endeavoured to make these things clear (i. e. the follies of heathenism) and to withdraw men from the worship of dæmons, those very dæmons incited men who delighted in evil, to put him to death as an impious person and an atheist; saying that he was endeavouring to introduce a new divinity. We are treated as he was, for it was not among the Greeks only that these things were reproved by the [divine] Wisdom, through Socrates; but among the barbarians it was done also by the same Wisdom, which took a visible form, and became a man called Jesus Christ, whom we obey: and accordingly we not only call these [the heathen gods] not good spirits, but we call them bad and unholy spirits, inasmuch as they do things that no one professing and loving virtue among men would imitate. . Hence we are called atheists, and we acknowledge that we are so, as far as concerns those whom you esteem to be gods,

* The word here used is λογος, logos, i. e. word or wisdom. It is used immediately after to express that Divine manifestation whom we call Christ.

but not so to the true God and Father of righteousness, and holiness, and all other virtues unmixed with any evil. And we honour and worship Him in wisdom and truth, and the Son sent from Him, to teach these things to us and to the host of good angels following, and like to him;—and the prophetic Spirit:—wishing without envy to teach to all what has been imparted to us.” He then demands that, if found guilty of any crime, they should be punished as evil doers, but if innocent of wrong, should be subject to no punishment as christians, (this was also the law of Adrianus,) adding, “we do not ask for the punishment of the informers against us: (which by the same law of Adrianus could have been claimed) their own evil mind is punishment enough.”—And he then argues that the spread of the christian doctrine would be advantageous, rather than otherwise: for what human laws were unable to effect, the divine Logos (word or wisdom) would accomplish, if not defeated by the efforts made against it. “If we were disturbers of the public peace,” he adds, “and awaited a human kingdom, we should hide ourselves from our prosecutors, and deny our faith when brought into danger

by it : but as our hopes are not those of this present world, and we know that we must at any rate die, we shrink not from the avowal. So far from being bad subjects we are rather your supporters and allies (he is addressing the emperor and his colleagues) ; for if all men knew and believed that nothing can be hid from God ; and that every one would go into eternal misery or salvation according to his actions, no one would do evil. . . . We are not atheists," he exclaims again, " for we worship the Maker of all, not with blood and libations and incense, for we have been taught that prayer and thanksgiving which on all occasions we employ to the best of our power, form the only true and worthy service : and that those things which are given by Him for our nourishment are not to be wasted in the fire, but used for ourselves, and whoever else is in need : thus showing our gratitude to him ; and by rational ceremonies and hymns, giving thanks for creation, for the means of preservation, for the making of living beings, for the change of the seasons, and for the regenerating us in corruption, sending up our petitions through faith in him. Who is there in his senses that will not confess all this ?

And our teacher in these things, and who was born for this purpose, was Jesus Christ, who was crucified under the rule of Pontius Pilate in Judæa, in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar: and we have learned that this person was the Son of the Living God, and we honour him in the second place, as we do the prophetic Spirit in the third. And in this we are affirmed to be mad, in that we give the second place after the unchangeable and ever living God, to a crucified man; — they who say so not knowing the mystery of this But we having obeyed the Logos,* have forsaken these [dæmon gods which before were objects of worship] and follow the laws of the one eternal God, through his Son: so that we who formerly delighted in lasciviousness, now embrace a modest decent mode of life, we who before used magical arts, now dedicate ourselves to the good and uncreated God, we who loved riches and large revenues beyond anything, now bring what we have to the common

* I give the Greek word because it has several meanings, and I am unwilling to fix my own interpretation upon it. It signifies the reasoning power—a rational argument—a word—a treatise—and finally, the wisdom of God.

stock, so that those who are in need may be relieved : those who before hated and slew one another, and would hold no communication with those of a different tribe, now, since the manifestation of Christ, eat together, praying for their enemies; endeavouring to persuade those who wrongfully hate them, that whoever lives according to the excellent precepts of Christ may be of good hope that with us he will obtain the good things of God the Lord of all. And that we may not appear to be mere sophists, we think it good to say somewhat of the precepts of Christ : it will be for you, as powerful monarchs, to examine whether we have learned and teach the truth. His words were short and compendious, for He was no sophist, but the power and wisdom of God. With regard to chastity and purity he said " He that looks on a woman to desire her has already committed adultery before God," and " If thine eye or hand be a snare to thee, cut it off," &c. Thus while human laws permit double marriages, our Teacher calls those sinners who only desire to be so in their hearts : He not only cast off those who have actually committed acts of impurity, but those also who have contemplated them with pleasure :

because it is not actions alone that are manifest before God, but desires also. Thus many of both sexes among us, of sixty and seventy years of age, who had learned to obey Christ from their childhood, lead a life of complete purity, and I am proud to say that I can point out such among all classes. What shall I say of the countless numbers who have turned from a life of licentiousness to learn these things? for Christ did not call the temperate to repentance, but the licentious, the impious, the unjust, as he himself said . . . for our heavenly Father wills the repentance rather than the punishment of the sinner.—With regard to the love of all, he taught these things, ‘If ye love those that love you, what novelty is it? The worst do that: but I say to you, pray for your enemies, and love those who hate you,’ &c. Of giving alms without ostentation, he said, ‘I say to you, give to those that ask you, and turn not away from him that would borrow of you:’ for if you give or lend to him from whom you expect to receive, what novelty is it? The farmers of the revenue will do that. ‘But lay up for yourselves treasures,’ &c. —With regard to the bearing evils with patience, and the being

ready to serve all, and the overcoming of all passionate anger, he said, 'To him who strikes thee on one cheek offer the other,' &c. 'Let your good works so shine before men, that, seeing them, they may bow wonderingly to your Father in heaven : ' for we ought not to be imitators of evil, but by mildness and patience lead wrong doers away from their evil prejudices.—With regard to not swearing at all, and speaking the truth always, he said 'Swear not at all, but say merely yes or no : more than this cometh of evil.'—As to how the One God ought to be worshipped, he thus commanded, saying, 'The great commandment is, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve, with thy whole heart, and thy whole strength ; namely, the Lord God who made thee.' But those who are found not living as he taught may be known not to be christians, even though they repeat with their lips the precepts of Christ, for he said that not those who repeated them alone, but those who practised them in their actions, would be saved. Let those who do not follow his precepts be punished ; they are christians only in name, and deserve it at your hands. We endeavour to the utmost to pay

all dues and taxes imposed on us according to His command, 'Render unto Cæsar,' &c. . . . Hence we worship the One God only, and joyfully serve you in all other things, acknowledging you as kings and rulers, and rejoicing that the regal power should be in the hands of men so good and wise."

After noticing much that was disgusting in the mythology of the state, the christian philosopher thus proceeds, "But as we have already said, these are the actions of evil dæmons: we have learned otherwise, and believe that those only attain immortality who approach God by a holy and virtuous life; but that the unjust, who do not repent and change their conduct, are punished in eternal fire. But the Son of God called Jesus, although commonly reputed a mere man, was by his wisdom worthy to be called the Son of God being in a peculiar manner and differently from the common mode of generation made by God—who is His wisdom, His firstborn, and His power: by His will made man in order to teach us these things, and thus recall and lead back to Him the whole human race and those who live according to the wisdom of God

(μετα λογου) are christians, although they are thought atheists, as were Socrates and Heracleitus and those like them among the Greeks; and among the barbarians, Abraham, and Ananias, and Azarias, and Misael, and Elias, and many others whose names and actions would be too long to repeat here. Those also of the ancients who lived without wisdom are worthless, enemies of Christ, and murderers of those who live according to wisdom: but those last who have lived, or live now as christians, are without fear or perturbation.—We will now explain the way in which we devote ourselves to God, being renovated through Christ; lest by passing this over in silence it should appear that there was something amiss in our teaching. As many as believe the things which we teach to be true, and promise as far as they are able to live accordingly, are taught to pray, and ask, fasting, from God the taking away of their sins, we praying and fasting along with them. Then they are brought by us to a place where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner as we ourselves are regenerated in the name of God the Father and Lord of all, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of

the Holy Spirit; and are at that time washed in the water; for Christ himself said, 'Unless ye are regenerate ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.' As also was written beforehand by the prophet Isaiah, 'Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil from your souls,' &c. For since we are of necessity, and without our own knowledge generated by our parents and educated in evil habits and bad customs, this remission of sins by water, and the consecration in the name of God, which is called regeneration, is granted to us lest we should remain the children of ignorance, and in order that we should thenceforth be what we are by choice and knowledge; having repented of the sins we have committed, and being called by the name of the God and Father and Lord of all, in the manner before said. . . . This washing is called illumination, as being an enlightenment of the minds of those who have learned these things.

"Jesus, the Christ, is the son and messenger of God; being in the first place his wisdom; (λογος) and of old manifested sometimes in the form of fire, sometimes in a figure without body; but now by the will of God being made

man among the human race, he endured and suffered all that the dæmons inflicted upon him by the hands of the insane Jews. . . . This wisdom being the firstborn of God, is also God, and first was manifested in the form of fire, and in a bodiless appearance to Moses and the other prophets, but now in our time, as we have said, was made man of a virgin, according to his Father's will, for the salvation of those who believe him; and submitted to be degraded and to suffer, in order that by dying and rising again he might vanquish death.

"After having thus washed the person who has submitted to our law and embraced our opinions, we lead him to those whom we call brethren, where they are assembled praying with their whole hearts altogether both for themselves, and for him who is now enlightened, and for all others everywhere dispersed; that they may be found worthy to learn the truth, and through good works to be managers and guards of what they are charged with; so that we may all attain eternal salvation. The prayers being over, we embrace each other with a kiss. Then there is placed before the brethren who are present bread, and a drink of water and wine mixed, and

taking this we give praise and glory to the Father of all, through the name of his Son and of the Holy Spirit, and we give thanks* abundantly for all that he has vouchsafed to give us; and the prayers and thanksgiving (eucharist) being completed, all the people present join in an acclamation of Amen. And this Amen is a Hebrew word, which signifies 'may it be so.' Then all present, giving thanks, and the whole people joining in the acclamation, those whom we call deacons give to every person present a portion of the bread and wine mixed with water, over which thanksgiving has been made, and carry it to those who are not present. This nourishment is called by us the Eucharist, which none are allowed to partake of save those who believe in the truth of our doctrines, and have been washed in the bath of regeneration for the removal of sin, as Christ has taught. For we do not take this as common bread or common drink, but since the incarnate Jesus Christ our Saviour, through the wisdom and word of God assumed flesh and blood for our salvation, so

* *Εὐχαριστίαν ποιῶνται*, the eucharist or thanksgiving is made.

this food, constituted the eucharist by the word of prayer, from which by assimilation and change, our flesh and blood is nourished, is, we have been taught, the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus.* For the apostles, in

* Thus also Irenæus writes, "As that which is bread by its earthly substance, when it is consecrated by the invocation of God is no longer common bread but the Eucharist, consisting of two things, the earthly and the spiritual; so our bodies, having received the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, but have the hope of arising again for eternity." The opinion of the early church on this head is therefore clearly defined, and is valuable from clearing at once a difficulty that arose afterwards among less spiritualized believers in the middle ages. The theory of Justinus and Irenæus is clearly this—man by nature is mortal, and by choice had unspiritualized that nature to the utmost: Christ took up flesh and blood in order to show how it might be purified by the spiritualization of its desires; and finally gave the proof of its possible immortality by the example of his own resurrection. By following his steps, the believer when receiving the Eucharist, becomes a partaker of his nature; and as his soul is one with Christ in spiritual life, so he also receives the body and blood of Christ, namely, a corporeal capability of existence with him in a state of higher perfection. The metaphor is a beautiful one, and it is much to be regretted that the grossness of an unspiritual age so far abused it as to corporealise it into transubstantiation: and it is further to be regretted that their disgust at this last doctrine led the reformers generally to lose sight of the real sense of Christ's words, so carefully explained by these fathers.

the records written by them which are called the Gospels, teach that Jesus taking the bread and giving thanks, commanded them saying, 'Do this in remembrance of me, for this is my body,' and in like manner taking the cup and giving thanks, he said, 'this is my blood,'—and distributed it to them only. After this it is our custom to remind each other of these circumstances; and those who have property relieve those who are in want: we being always much in each other's society. Moreover for all the things which we contribute, we thank the Maker of all, through his Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit; and on the day called Sunday, all that dwell either in the city or the country meet together, when as much of the records of the apostles, and the writings of the prophets as the time will permit, is read. When the reading has ceased, the president gives an admonition, and an exhortation to all to follow such bright examples; after this, all stand up together and pray; and, as I said before, after the prayer ceases, bread, and wine mixed with water are brought, and the president prays and gives thanks with his whole heart, and the people acclaim 'Amen,'—the giving and

receiving of the Eucharist by each is performed, and to those not present it is sent by the deacons. Those who are rich, and are so inclined, bring what they like to give according to their respective choice; and what is thus brought is placed in the hands of the president for the relief of orphans, and widows, and those who are in want from sickness or any other cause; and those who are in bonds, and strangers, and in short, all who need assistance."

I have quoted thus largely from Justinus because his *Apology* is more systematically arranged than those of the other christian remonstrants,—because it is the earliest now extant,*—and because it gives a more complete view of the rites and doctrines of the church at that time than is found in any other writer that has been handed down to us. The views of the martyr, however, were those of the other writers of that period, as will be amply seen by a reference to them.

Athenagoras who addressed an apology to

* I believe an apology of Melito, bishop of Sardis, has been discovered among the Syriac MSS. brought home by Mr. Curzon. It is not yet published, and is most probably of a later date than that of Justinus.

Marcus Aurelius, when the christians were again subjected to persecution in the reign of that emperor, meets the charge of atheism so commonly made against them by proving philosophically the necessary being of a God; and then continues thus:

“That we are not atheists has already been sufficiently shown by me—we, who teach that there is One uncreated, eternal, invisible, impassible, incomprehensible, infinite, God; only to be conceived in the mind and the reason; surrounded by light, and beauty, and inexpressible power: who created, arranges, and governs the universe by his Wisdom and Word. (λογος.) We conceive also a son of God: and let no one think it ridiculous that there should be a Son of God; for we do not think of either God the Father, or God the Son as the poets feign, who make their gods no better than men: but the son of God is the wisdom of God in manifestation and energy;* for by and

* *Ιδέα και ενεργεια.* Athenagoras was a Platonic philosopher, as was also Justinus; and the use of the word *idea* here is explained by a similar passage in the apology of the latter, where speaking of the manifestation of the Logos, he says, “anciently it was *εν ιδεα πυρος* to Moses; namely, in the appearance of flame. Ideas,

through it, or him, all things were made; the Father and the Son being one: the Son being in the Father and the Father in the Son in the unity and power of the Spirit. The Son of God is the mind and reason of the Father. But if through your high intelligence it should happen that you should enquire 'wha tis meant by this Son?' I briefly answer that it is the first production of the Father, not as being made, for God was from the first, being an eternal mind, and had in himself reason, λογος, —being essentially rational,—λογικος: and this the prophetic Spirit also affirms: for 'the Lord,' it says, 'established me in the beginning of his progress towards his works.' —For in those who spoke prophetically the Holy Spirit itself wrought, that Spirit being, as we say, an emanation from God, flowing from and belonging to him as rays do to the sun." *

Nearly the same argument is repeated by Theophilus, bishop of Antioch, in his treatise addressed to Antolycus; by Irenæus, and by

in the philosophy of Plato, were substantial emanations from all objects; the idea, or emanation alone, being that of which the mind takes cognisance.

* ATHENAG. *Legat. pro Christianis*.

Clemens Alexandrinus;* but it is so admirably given by Tertullianus that I shall quote by preference from that writer. "We have already said," he writes, "that God made the whole of the world by his word and reason and power; . . . and we also ascribe to the word, reason, or power, by which we say that God constructed every thing, a proper spiritual substance, which is the Word when pronounced, and Reason when arranging, and Power when performing. This we learn to have emanated from God, and in this process to have been generated, and therefore called the Son of God, and also God; for God is spirit. Thus when the ray emanates from the sun it is a portion of it; but the sun is in the ray because the ray is of the substance of the sun, and the substance is not separated but extended. So also Spirit emanates from Spirit, God from God, as light from light. The original thing remains undiminished and unaltered, how many soever properties may be deduced from it. And thus, what ema-

* Space will not allow of very large quotations; and as the substance of this writer's opinions has been given in No. VII. of the *Small Books*, I must refer the reader to that for a more detailed account of his works.

nates from God is God, and the Son of God, and both are one.—And from this ray of God falling on a certain Virgin, and creating a human embryo, was born a man mixed with God: for the flesh, fashioned by the Spirit was nourished, grew, spoke, taught, worked, and is Christ. . . . We say, and we say it openly;—bleeding and torn by your tortures, we repeat it aloud; we worship God by, and through Christ. You think him a man, but God has chosen to be known and worshipped only by means of, and through him.*

Of the object of this incarnation of the Deity Irenæus thus speaks: "It was not possible to learn the things of God unless our Teacher, the living Word, had been made man; for none can tell us of the Father but his own Logos. . . . Nor could we learn otherwise than by seeing our Maker and hearing his voice, that we might become imitators of his actions and doers of the things he spoke,

* TERTULL. *Ap. c.* 21. I have preferred taking the christian doctrine from the early apologies, because as they were addressed to the emperors and senate of Rome they were likely to be well weighed; and as they were not written in confutation of any error, the writer was not likely to give an undue preference to one part of the christian doctrine over the rest.

by having communion with him, and receiving improvement from him who is perfect, and first of all things. . . . This potent Logos, being also truly man, and by his blood affording us a rational redemption, gave himself as the ransom for those who were carried into captivity. And since sin ruled over us unjustly, and, though we were of the nature of the omnipotent God, alienated us from him against our nature, and made us his own slaves,—the omnipotent Logos of God not choosing to be wanting in justice, acted honestly even towards sin, and redeemed us from him, even though we were his, i. e. God's, own property: and this not with violence,—as sin had first obtained dominion over us, seizing upon those who were not his, with insatiable rapacity,—but by persuasion, as was becoming in the Deity; who persuading instead of compelling, receives those whom he chooses, having thus taken care that neither should justice be infringed, nor the work of God perish. The Lord therefore redeeming us with his own blood, and giving his life for our life, and his flesh for our flesh, and pouring out the Spirit of the Father for the union and communion of God and man, bringing down God to man

by his Spirit, and God again raising man to himself by his incarnation, gives us incorruption certainly and truly by his advent, and by the communion which this opened with him."*

The doctrines taught in the christian church at the time I am treating of may therefore be thus summed up.

1. That ONE, intelligent, eternal, self-existent, infinite, Power is the First Cause of all things.

2. That God, the Maker of all things being necessarily a rational mind, has in Himself from all eternity that rational power which, when in active operation, is said to be his Son or Word.

3. That in order to communicate to the creatures whom he had made in his own image; i. e. rational, the certain knowledge of divine things, the Word, or active rational power of the Deity, (λογος) was made manifest to men in a human form, which human form was likewise the Son of God in the same sense that Adam was, namely by an immediate act of creation without the intervention of any earthly father.

* IREN. *adv. Hær.* lib. v. c. 1.

4. That man having been enslaved by sin, and thus become alien to the household of God; his original Master, i. e. his Maker, resolved on reclaiming his own, and though wrongfully deprived of his servants, obtained them back, according to legal justice by giving an equivalent, namely Christ Jesus, the just for the unjust: or in other words, that mankind having become enslaved to sensuality and vice so far that the preaching of better morals was distasteful to them, the Divine Teacher suffered death from the obdurate men of the age whose prejudices he had offended, in order to recall the human race from error by example and precept, and to sanctify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. The death of this Teacher was the ransom paid to sin in order to free men from their bondage.*

* It is unfortunate, so far as the full comprehension of the New Testament is concerned, that the system of slavery has been so long abolished in Europe, that the metaphors taken from what was then constantly under the eyes of all, make no impression on the imagination now, and indeed to many are nearly unintelligible: as, for instance, few form any very definite idea of the ransom paid by Christ; and would be puzzled to say, without a few minutes' reflection, to whom it was paid, or

The rites of the church, as has already been seen, were of the simplest description: the duties were performed by,

1. Catechists; whose business it was to instruct and prepare the converts or catechumens, for baptism.

2. Deacons; who were charged with the business of carrying the bread and wine of the eucharist to the people;—the distribution of alms;—and the taking due information as to the character and needs of the christian brotherhood, so as to be able to report to the

for what purpose; and the word redemption is often used in a sense quite at variance with that in which the apostle understood it. Bekker's *Gallus*, which, however heavy as a tale, is full of valuable information, gives so full an account of slavery in one of his chapters, that, as the work is now translated and accessible to all, I need not here enter upon the subject at any length. I will merely notice that the word used by the Apostle Paul for the being in captivity to sin is derived from *αἰχμάλωτος*, namely, a slave taken by the spear—or in other words an enslaved prisoner of war. The Romans did not generally allow slaves to be enrolled in their legions; but in Athens bought slaves were armed, and used as the city guard and public force; and even in Rome in later times, captives were enrolled. It is well known that many less valuable slaves might be bought by the offer of one of more value; and the apostles and other early writers delight in carrying out this metaphor in every form most likely to impress the imagination. Christ Jesus was given up to sinful men to be tortured

bishop when called on—and Deaconesses; usually elderly widows who were charged with like offices with regard to the female part of the flock: they also acted as catechists for women, in order that no room for scandal might be afforded in countries where the intercourse between the two sexes was limited by the customs of society.

3. Presbyters, i. e. elders or men of mature age; who, in the absence of the bishop, preached, prayed, and blessed the eucharist.

and put to death in exchange for all mankind, to whom he then offered a free service in the army of God; to which end they were to take arms, offensive and defensive that they might fight for him, *Eph.* vi. 15-17; they were to wield heavy arms, ὄπλα, *Rom.* vi. 13; they were to be enrolled among the free legionaries and receive a donative, χάρισμα, instead of the mere daily rations, ὄψον, of the ordinary soldier. Elsewhere christians are said to be bought with a price, and thus made the property of God; to be marked,—as in the case of fugitive slaves, who were branded when reclaimed by the owner; and Christ is termed their Lord, as slaves were wont to term their masters. These are but a few instances of the constantly recurring use of metaphors taken from slavery, but are sufficient perhaps to impress my readers with the necessity of making themselves better acquainted than we usually are, with the customs of early times in this particular, if we mean thoroughly to understand the value of the terms still currently used in theology.

4. Bishops; who as the name *ἐπίσκοπος* imports, were the overseers of the whole church. At that early period it does not appear that the bishops' jurisdiction was very extensive; for most cities had their especial bishop; and there were also what were called chorepiscopi, or bishops of country districts, appointed in the surrounding regions.

Baptism at this early period was most usually administered to persons who had been converted from heathenism, and were consequently adults; and this was the case so generally that all the terms used with regard to this sacrament have evidently regard to the repentance and newness of life expected from the sincere convert to christianity, as may be seen in the quotation already given from Justinus the Martyr's first Apology; but very soon christian parents began to feel a natural anxiety that their children should become partakers of the same benefits which they themselves hoped for, and offered them for baptism at a very early age. In this case, as life was uncertain, and it was desirable that those should not relapse into polytheism who had received the seal of Christ, and passed through the bath of regeneration, as it was

then called,—sponsors were required to answer for the child whom they thus presented for baptism, and whose future education in the faith they were thus bound to superintend. Tertullianus in his treatise *de Baptismo*, objects to this practice: indeed he urges strongly the delay of baptism in all cases till the convert is sufficiently instructed and grounded in the faith to make it likely that he would neither dishonour his profession, nor incur hazard to his own soul by rashly or hastily receiving so holy an ordinance; “and especially,” he says, “this should be attended to in the case of very young children. Why should the sponsors be brought into peril, since they too by the chances of mortality, or their own evil will, may be prevented from fulfilling their promise. But the Lord has said, ‘Do not prevent them from coming to me;’ let them come then, but let them come when they are growing up; when they can learn, and have been taught what they are about, and to whom they come;—when they can know Christ. Why should their innocent age be in haste to obtain remission of sins?” —The last words are remarkable, coupled as they must have been in his recollection with

the words of Christ, "for of such is the kingdom of heaven," since it is evident from them, that at that time infants were not supposed to have in them any inherent, or birth sin, which required to be washed away the moment they were born into the world by the cleansing water of baptism. Baptism, it is here evident, was at that time considered as needful only to those who were capable of feeling its import. The caution however seems to have been but little regarded, and infant baptism grew more frequent in the subsequent centuries.

The usual mode of receiving a convert was to place him under the care of the appointed catechist, who was charged to instruct him in the faith. When the course was complete, he was required to make a short profession of his belief; and for this purpose it does not appear that any settled form was required, as we find a somewhat different formula in the writings of Irenæus and of Tertullianus. It is given very shortly by this last, and is as follows:

"To believe in one God omnipotent, the Maker of the world, and in his Son Jesus Christ; born of the Virgin Mary; crucified

under Pontius Pilatus; raised from the dead the third day, received into the heavens; sitting now in the place of honour with the Father; and to come hereafter to judge the living and the dead, even by the resurrection of the flesh."

"This rule of faith being admitted," says this writer, "other points of discipline and custom admit of correction," &c. The convert therefore, having thus professed his faith, and renounced the pomps of the devil* was baptized according to the forms in use at the time, which very soon varied from the simplicity to be seen in the first quoted account of them. Tertullianus thus mentions the various deviations from the first simple teaching of the apostles. "Before we go into the

* The early christians considered the heathen rites to be especially devoted to the honour of evil spirits, known under the name of Jupiter, &c. and the renunciation here made, which has been inadvertently preserved in our baptismal service, related to the practices of idolatry. The pomps—pompas—which the convert was to renounce, were the processions so called, which were indeed of a nature that no christian could be present at: and the other impurities and works of the devil were the games and shows which formed so large and so disgusting a part of polytheism. This will readily be seen by consulting the writers of this century.

water at baptism," says he, "we renounce the devil, his pomps and his angels: [ministers]—then we are dipped three times, which is somewhat more than the Lord commanded in the gospel. Being received from the water, we taste the union of honey and milk, and from that day for the whole week we use no other bath. The sacrament of the eucharist we take only from the hands of the president, and in assemblies before dawn.—We make oblations for the dead, and on birth-days annually. On the Lord's day we hold it wrong to fast, or to pray kneeling, and we enjoy the same immunity from Easter to Pentecost. We feel uneasy if any part falls to the earth from the cup or of the bread. In all our journeyings and movements, at our going out and coming in, at our putting on our clothes and our shoes, at our baths, tables, lamps, beds, and seats, whenever, in short, we act at all, we impress our foreheads with the sign of the cross. But if you search the scripture for those practices you will find none of them. . . . Custom in civil things is taken for a law when there is no law upon the subject and are not the faithful to be allowed to exercise and institute what

they think conducive to discipline and the good of all, if it be not repugnant to the law of God.”*

It would have been well for the church if this liberty had been used with a more sparing hand, and when used at all, if it had been always coupled with the proviso which the writer has so carefully inserted. We of the present time can trace in them in different matters the germ of much superstition in later ages.

The early habits and education of the first converts to christianity necessarily gave a tincture to their opinions even after they had embraced that faith, and several heresies, namely, doctrines separate from those of the church at large, were preached by different persons, whose names may be found in all works professing to treat of church history: it would be merely a loss of time to go over them separately. They may however be classed so as to show what were the habits of thought out of which they grew.

The union of the Divinity with man was something so beyond the complete compre-

* *De Coron. Militis*, c. 3, 4.

hension of any, that the first step in christianity, which consisted in the acknowledgment of such an union, must necessarily have given rise to much conjecture, since upon it depended the whole hope of the convert; and out of these conjectures arose two extreme opinions; the one, that of Kerinthos, that Jesus Christ was a mere human prophet; the other, that of the Dokētai,* who held that the body of Christ was simply an appearance, without any real bodily substance. The first still has its representatives in the ultra unitarians of our own time: but the second has entirely died away.

But there was yet another difficulty in the way of the convert:—while the universe was held to be either self-generated, or the work of different artificers, the evils which apparently vitiated the whole, were nothing extraordinary; but when the christian faith taught that God was the One Creator, and that all proceeded from him, the question which had so often been mooted by the different philosophical sects, arose again:—whence is evil? —The whole east had adopted the notion of

* From *δοκέω*, to seem.

two principles warring with each other, but both eternal, i. e.

1. Matter, or evil, or darkness, inert and incapable of reasoning.

2. Spirit, or good, or light, active and intelligent, and alone deserving our concern.

These two were personified as Ahriman and Mithra by the Persians, and the Jews during their intercourse with Persia learned to attribute much of the qualities of Ahriman to their Satan. This philosophy which had been that of many of the oriental christians before their conversion, seemed to open some solution of the difficulty; and Valentinus and others, framed from it a system which they called *γνῶσις*, or knowledge; whence those who embraced it were called Gnostics. Combining in some measure the cosmogony of Hesiod with the doctrine of the two principles, they supposed a Plerōma, or fulness of ages (*αιῶνα*, æons, or in other words, eternity) before all things; which they also called *βυθος*, or profundity; and with him, for this abstract idea had a sex imputed to it, was *εννοια*, understanding;—otherwise called *χαρις* and *σιγη*, i. e. love, and silence. From the union of these *νοῦς*, i. e. mind, was generated :

the first-born was like, and equal to the father, from whom he emanated, and was alone capable of comprehending him. At the same time a second emanation took place; and this was named *αληθεια*, i. e. truth. These also united, and produced *λογον* and *ζωην*, i. e. reason and life; and these last by their conjunction produced man, and the church. Various other æons arose from these, which it would be useless to trace. Then *Νοῦς*, the first-born, in conjunction with *Αληθεια* produced a further emanation of Christ and the Holy Spirit, who were able to declare to the world the mystery of their Father. Numerous other allegorical unions take place; the product always becoming somewhat less perfect, till the Demi-urgus, or Creator is generated; and this Being, of an inferior and imperfect nature, finally produces the world and all things in it, imperfect like himself.

This is but a very slight sketch of the Gnostic doctrine which varied in the hands of its different teachers: the fundamental part, however, namely, the imperfection of matter, and the consequent existence of evil remained alike in all.*

* A reference to No. xiv. of the *Small Books* &c.

These three species of heresy were combated with great eagerness by the bishops and teachers of the church in general, and with one especial evil consequence;—namely, that in the heat of controversy, the points of difference between the heretic and the orthodox, were strained and exaggerated till it became difficult to find the plain truth amid the war of words which ensued. In proportion as men were earnest and zealous in their christian profession, they warmed in the contest, and if a hot temper was added to religious zeal, as in the case of Tertullianus, not much fairness towards his adversary, or care in the choice of his own language was to be expected: christian charity was lost sight of in the first place, and christian truth was too often impaired in the next. In the above mentioned author's attack on Hermogenes, one of the last mentioned class of heretics, who had held the eternity of matter, he boldly charges him with maintaining the doctrine of two Gods; which indeed, in strictness, might

p. 60, where I have endeavoured to explain the *Magian* doctrine of the two principles will elucidate the subject. This doctrine was the foundation of the *Manichean* heresy which became famous at a later period.

be derived from that first proposition, but which evidently had never entered into the contemplation of Hermogenes himself: and in the warmth with which he declaims against Praxeas, who had insisted, without regard to the church's doctrine on this head,—that God the Father suffered in Christ, he insists so strongly on the distinction of office in the Divine nature, as almost to make a separation in the individuality; notwithstanding his own strongly declared opinion in other places, one of which I quoted above. It is to the apologies therefore, as I have already observed, that we must turn for the real christian faith; for these were unwarpd by the heat of controversy, and were calm representations of the practices of the believers in, and plain expositions of the doctrines of Christ.





CHAPTER IV.

THIRD CENTURY.

THE Roman Empire was now verging fast towards its decadence: vice and luxury had unfitted the youth for the military service which the increasing pressure of the surrounding barbarous nations rendered more and more onerous; and Severus, a soldier rather than a statesman, recruited his armies from the hardier natives of countries less enervated by their social habits. The prætorian guard was filled up by drafts of the best soldiers from foreign stations, and its ranks were thus completed with natives of Pannonia, Noricum, and Spain. The consequence of this was that it became thenceforth a rare thing to see a Roman of ancient family, clad in the purple. Pannonian semi-barbarians wielded the power of that great empire more than once, and brought with them the gross vices and contempt of learn-

ing belonging to their early breeding: the general dissolution of manners was thus increased by the decline of refinement.

Severus died in Britain about A. D. 210, and his son Antoninus, nick-named Caracalla, in a few years undid all that his father had done towards the reform of the army. One maxim only of the deceased emperor was attended to, and that was fatal to the state. Severus had said, that the sovereign who could depend on his army had nothing to fear: accordingly Caracalla squandered the treasures of the state in order to gain the favour of the soldiery, and oppressed the people by heavy taxes in order to raise sums sufficient for his profusion. The extension of the rights of Roman citizens to nearly all the subjects of the empire; the only wise act, so far as we can see, of this reign,—might have done something, perhaps, towards uniting the unwieldy mass into a more vigorous whole; but it seems to have been resorted to as a fiscal measure solely, for the sake of increasing the revenue; and whatever possible good might have resulted from it, had it been done by a better prince, was neutralized entirely by the mad profusion of Caracalla, who

was wont to say that all wealth should be in the hands of the emperor, not in those of his subjects. His want of conduct gave courage to the barbarians, as the Roman historians call the German tribes, and he was obliged to have recourse to the dangerous expedient of purchasing a peace; nay, he is said to have promised that they would find Rome an easy prey if they invaded the empire. This lesson probably was not forgotten in after years.

Monster of cruelty as Caracalla was, for the wholesale slaughters which he commanded are almost incredible, he was favourable to the christians. In his childhood he had been under the care of a tutor professing that faith, and at that time gave signs of having in some measure profited by it: for he expressed horror at gladiatorial shows, &c. Perhaps he remembered with respect, though he no longer practised the precepts impressed on his childish mind: at any rate during this reign the christians enjoyed a period of peace. After a reign of about seven years he was murdered, and Macrinus the præfect of the guard, who had secretly caused his assassination, was proclaimed emperor by the soldiery, only to be murdered by them in his turn the year after.

It was in vain that those who saw the evils resulting to the empire from this state of things endeavoured to restore military discipline: the attempt, as will be seen yet farther as we advance in time, usually ended in the murder of the reformer, and some new emperor was set up only to be in his turn assassinated when the troops found him less compliant or less profuse than they expected. Fresh pretenders were continually arising, for each army wished its own chief to be emperor; and the strength and riches of the state and provinces were wasted in vain contests for power, which left the country in which they took place desolate and depopulated. The rude but hardy nations that bordered on the north and east of the empire soon perceived that the legions of Rome were not what they had been; and they ventured to cross the frontiers and make marauding incursions into the rich and cultivated country which was often but weakly guarded. The cattle and slaves of the proprietors were carried off in repeated forays of this kind, and very soon the border land became nearly desert. The devastation of some parts made the imposts fall with a yet heavier weight on

the other provinces, or ruinously on those already impoverished, and thus fresh discontents were fostered.

It has already been seen that though no positive rescript on the part of the emperors made the actual profession of christianity penal, yet that whenever the illiterate vulgar could be excited to tumult, the professors of this faith were subjected to the most cruel barbarities, often encouraged, seldom effectually restrained by the civil authorities. But the doctrine of Christ could not be thus stifled: daily conversions took place among all classes; and these cruelties only increased their number, by drawing attention to the system which could engender such unshrinking fortitude. "The more you cut off,"—exclaims Tertullianus, towards the close of his apology, "the more numerous we become: our blood is the seed from which christians spring up. . . . Who is there who after seeing such things does not inquire, 'What is there at the bottom of this?' Who that has inquired has failed to be converted? and, being converted, who is there that does not wish to suffer in order that he may bring back the complete favour of God, and

expedite his pardon by paying his blood for it?—For this act wins pardon for all past crimes.”* Christianity therefore was now no longer an obscure sect, whose professors, when persecuted in one place fled to another: it had assumed a prouder attitude, and derision of heathen superstitions was beginning to take the place of the calm though firm tone of the earlier apologists. But just in the proportion that this change took place, the christian was departing from the spirit of his Lord: and though the writings of Tertullianus may afford us examples of fiery eloquence and clever sarcasm, which excite admiration from their rhetorical merit, we are forced to acknowledge at the same time, that the tone assumed by Melito, Justinus, and the other earlier christian writers, better became the disciple of the meek Jesus. But unjust treatment had embittered the minds

* I subjoin the original of this remarkable passage, “Plures efficimur, quoties metimur a vobis: semen est sanguis christianorum. . . . Quis enim non contemplatione ejus concutitur ad requirendum, quid intus in re sit?—Quis non, ubi requisivit, accedit—ubi accessit pati exoptat, ut totam Dei gratiam redimat, ut omnem veniam ab eo compensatione sanguinis sui expediat? omnia enim huic operi delicta donantur.”—*Apol. c. 50.*

of even the best: they had almost lost the hope of living in peace with their neighbours, and could only withdraw from intercourse with those who would not join in fellowship with them till they had sinned against God and their own conscience.

It is not in human nature to support very zealously a government under which neither life nor property are secure; and the sons of those whose parents had suffered for no crime but their pure faith, must have been less or more than men if the wound had not rankled. Their duty as christians was fulfilled when they had submitted; to forget was impossible: and if the precepts of Christ met with a spirit too fiery quite to bow in all things to the meekness of the gospel,—a heart stout enough to endure personal sufferings, but too warmly affectionate to bear the sight of a beloved parent, or sister, or friend tortured to death; then in such an one the feeling of the strength of numbers would awaken, and threats, such as those of Tertullianus to Scapula, would give a voice to what many were feeling, but had hardly dared to avow to themselves: and thus the growth of christianity became another difficulty in the government of the already unwieldy empire.

After the death of Macrinus the soldiery invested Elagabalus with the purple at so early an age that the tales of his vices, exceeding in turpitude anything known of even the most infamous of the Roman emperors,—seem almost incredible. It was impossible long to endure the rule of such a monster: to comment on a state of manners which made such things perpetrable, is equally so: he too was slain in a military tumult, and his cousin Alexander Severus raised to the throne.

Julia Mammæa, the mother of this young prince, is said to have been a christian; or, if not actually baptized, had at least heard the doctrine of Christ from the celebrated Origines, whom she sent for to Antioch in order to confer with him.* Her son does not appear to have been educated in this faith; but he could not fail to hear from Origines of a purer morality and a more spiritual worship than polytheism ever taught; and his young mind profited by it. If he saw an act of injustice committed, he asked the offender how he would like to be so treated himself; and when

* EUSEB. *Hist. Ecc.* lib. vi. c. 21.

a criminal was to be punished he caused the great rule of christianity, i. e. "*Quod tibi fieri non vis, alteri non feceris*," to be proclaimed aloud.* A conduct so different as his was from that of the emperors who had preceded him, made him the idol of both the senate and people, and enabled him to assume a degree of authority over the turbulent and licentious soldiery that scarcely any emperor had been able to exercise : for on one occasion when a mutiny had broken out in consequence of the arrest of some individuals among them for lewd and improper conduct, he dared to disband the whole legion ; like Cæsar addressing them as "*Quirites*," and requiring them to lay down their arms upon the spot : and this stern command was obeyed. But the evils of the empire were now past the chance of cure. On the one hand its extent gave so fair a chance of impunity in crime, that the best central government could not put a stop to the malversation of provincial governors, if they were not restrained by a higher principle than the dread of punishment : on the other, the ceremonies of the heathen ritual, at which

* *ÆL. LAMPRID. Alex. Vit. c. 51.*

public functionaries were expected to assist, being such as no christian could share in, the most conscientious persons, who were by this time nearly all converts to that faith, were excluded from office, and thus the government of the state was almost necessarily confided to the hands of the idle and the dissolute.

It is useless now to speculate on what might have been the consequence had the rulers of the empire at once seen how mighty an engine was now at work ; and known how to avail themselves of the services of men whose disinterestedness, benevolence, and courage would have fitted them to regenerate society. One thing at least is evident, i. e. that a wise and a good man, in whatever station, was made the worst possible use of, when he was given to a lion for food, instead of being employed in serving his fellow-creatures and society at large. The empire at last paid the penalty of this dire mistake ; for severity and injustice had at last hardened and soured the men, ay, and the women too, whom it could not subdue. The christian, after the persecutions towards the end of this century, had gained the stern character of a warrior, ready on all occasions to front death unflinchingly,

in whatever shape of torture it might come, rather than that of the meek disciple of Christ, seeking only to live in purity and love with his fellows; and paying affectionate homage to the Giver of all good. When this character of stern and almost fierce courage had been imposed on the women no less than the men of the christian community, what wonder was it if the gentleness, and even charity of the Gospel was sometimes almost overlooked. But this is in some measure anticipating the order of events and our business now is with the reign of Alexander Severus.

The sway of this prince, so early imbued with the principles of christianity, was of course favourable to its spread, and we find repeated allusions to the superior purity and integrity of persons of this persuasion, both in the sayings which have been recorded as his, no less than the decisions in their favour.*

* He is said to have insisted that the character of governors of provinces should be submitted to a previous scrutiny, like that used by the christians in the choice of their priests: and on one occasion where there was a dispute between some tavern keepers and christians, as to their right to a piece of public land, he decided in favour of the christians, saying it was better that God should be worshipped in any way in that spot, than that it should be devoted to the abominable practices carried

It is remarkable nevertheless, that he was obliged to desist from his endeavour to make the practice of some gross vices, penal, by the fear that it would not be borne. A severe lesson on this head had been given him by the murder of Ulpianus, his tutor, and præfect of the prætorian guard; under whose wise direction the attempted reforms had been conducted. Whilst these reforms only related to civil affairs they were endured; but when the restoration of military discipline was the question, the soldiery rebelled, and the bold reformer was sacrificed to their rage at his pupil's feet, and almost in his arms. The fate of his tutor was but the precursor of his own; for, a few years after, he too paid with his life for the fruitless endeavour to arrest the progress of corruption.

The troops, who had slain the amiable and accomplished Alexander Severus, to make way for the giant barbarian Maximinus, or rather who had acquiesced in his elevation, soon grew tired of their new creation, and slew him also, two emperors being in the meantime chosen by the senate as joint sovereigns: but almost

on in such houses as those of the other claimants. See
ÆL. LAMP. Alex. Vit.

immediately after, the prætorians took umbrage at the introduction of some German guards in the retinue of the new emperors, and murdered them both. They then placed Gordianus, a youth of thirteen, on the throne; and, for some years, his gentle nature and the wise government of his father-in-law Misitheus won him great popularity, but after the death of this last, Philippus, the præfect of the prætorian guard, found the prize almost within his reach, too great a temptation. He persuaded the troops that a general of more experience was needed; was associated with the young emperor in command, and soon brought on a quarrel in which Gordianus, being abandoned by the troops, was deposed and put to death. The obsequious senate ranked Gordianus among the gods, and at once submitted to his murderer. This had already happened so often, and was so often repeated afterwards, that it gives a character to the times, and naturally leads to inquiry as to what was the general state of a country in which such things were of common occurrence.

It has been already noticed that the small holders of land had in great measure dis-

appeared, and the natural consequence of this was that there was no middle class strong enough to have any voice in political affairs. The great patrician families, with suicidal selfishness, had hastened on the destruction of this important portion of the population, and almost annihilated the smaller proprietors; for incessant wars thinned the legions, and if the head of the family, or the heir of the small property fell thus, and left none who were able to cultivate the paternal inheritance with success, the great noble whose estates hemmed it in, found no difficulty in making it his own, either by purchase or by lending money on mortgage at exorbitant interest, and, as we should now call it, "foreclosing" when the debtors could no longer pay what was due. It was the discontent produced by this kind of proceeding which had caused most of the insurrections common in the middle period of the republic: and these having been very troublesome to the patricians, they lent a willing hand to the depression of the independent peasantry of Italy. Land was thus accumulated in the hands of a few great families; free labourers were scarce, and the ready expedient for making the overgrown

estate valuable was to employ slaves in its culture; since continual wars had rendered the supply of these abundant. But these were, for the most part, rude untaught men, whose position gave them neither voice nor concern in the affairs of Rome. Thus the hardy and free cultivators disappeared by degrees, and their loss was not felt by the nobles, who found their estates increased and their revenues larger in consequence; until, when ambitious leaders began to aim at supreme power, the Senate found too late that the class of men whose independent spirit in former days had constituted a barrier against tyranny, had disappeared, and that its decrees were of no avail against an overpowering military force, over which it had no longer any control. Thenceforward the Senate of Rome became subservient to whatever tyrant the army imposed upon it, and employed itself in little else than adulatory addresses to the reigning sovereign.

The same sort of change had taken place in these provinces where any vestige of popular freedom had existed at the time of their conquest. In Asia, the despotism of Rome did but succeed to the despotism, yet more oppres-

sive, of the native monarchs ; but in the north of Europe a sterner resistance had preserved for the people a shadow of their former freedom. In the time of Augustus a diet of deputies from the principal cities of Gaul had been held at Narbonne: in the reign of Vespasian another had been called by the citizens of Rheims, to which deputies from all the cities were invited, to decide on the question whether they should again submit to the Romans or fight for their liberty. Submission was decided on, and the nation, which had not courage to assert its liberties, naturally sank to the level of the other enslaved provinces. Occasionally the militia of the cities fought by the side of the Roman legions in defence of their hearths and homes: but the canker of the empire gradually ate away the strength of Gaul also: the free population disappeared before the cheaper and more easily-obtained slave labour, and slaves, to whom it mattered not who might be their master, and who generally, among the barbarian warriors who carried them off, resumed a certain degree of equality which bettered their condition, never defended the country, and not unfrequently aided the in-

vaders. Heavy taxes reduced the wealth of the larger proprietors, and ruined the smaller ones: and the consequence of this was that the predatory bands of the nations beyond the Rhine found little or no resistance save from the regular troops; so that, during the reign of Gallienus, a band of Franks having broken through the first line of defences, though followed and repeatedly defeated by Posthumus, the Roman general, penetrated without opposition to the Pyrenees, and having ravaged a part of Spain, embarked in some vessels they found in the ports of Catalonia, and carried their marauding bands into Africa. This outrage probably roused the Gallic province to its last effort for independence, which will be noticed a little farther on: but what could a nation do which had no hardy labourers to recruit its armies? centuries must elapse ere the lost free population could be replaced.

Meantime christianity continued to make rapid progress in all parts of the empire; for though during the short reign of Maximinus its professors, more especially the bishops, were exposed to persecution, as being supposed partisans of the family of Alexander; yet this ceased with the death of the tyrant,

and under Gordianus they were left in peace ; —under Philippus, treated with favour. It is asserted by the ecclesiastical writers of the time, and there seems no great reason to doubt the fact, that this emperor had himself embraced the faith of Christ, and submitted to a public penance for the crimes he had been guilty of; without which he could not have been received into communion. The edicts made by him against certain infamous vices which no previous emperor had dared to check, at least makes it probable that he had listened to other advisers than those of his predecessors. But the lesson which this prince had taught by his own example was soon put in practice against himself:—Decius, entrusted with the command of the army sent to quell a rebellion in Mœsia and Pannonia, himself rebelled, and a successful battle, in which Philippus was slain, placed the revolted general on the throne.

Whether Philippus had actually received baptism, or whether he had only favoured the Christians, his death was equally fatal to them. Like Maximinus, who had dreaded them as partisans of the murdered sovereign, Decius had hardly assumed the purple ere he pub-

lished an imperial edict, by which the profession of christianity was made penal, and for a time these unoffending subjects of the empire were subjected to the most unrelenting persecution.* He had, however, calculated ill: the severities of the law never yet prevented men from publishing to the world what they believe to be the truth; the more

* According to Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, whose letter is quoted by Eusebius, the sufferings to which the christians of that city were exposed were not entirely consequent on the edict of Decius; for about a year before this had been promulgated, "a certain soothsayer" had visited the city, and excited the people to vindicate the honour of their ancient deities: and being encouraged by those in authority, the populace attacked and plundered the houses of the christians, dragging forth the inmates, both men and women, and subjecting them to all kinds of cruelties, till the whole city had the appearance of a place taken by storm. It is possible, therefore, that Decius, in addition to the first motive, of ridding himself of the partisans of Philip, might also think he should gain popularity by such a step. Many were burnt alive; many tortured and beaten to death; and a yet greater number, who fled from their persecutors into the desert country, were never heard of more; having perished either by the attacks of robbers and wild beasts, or died from mere want. Many also wanted courage to profess their faith under such circumstances, and pale and trembling at what they were doing, aided at the heathen rites. Some few denied that they ever had been christians.

complete is the persuasion the more courageously is it avowed; and so great is the charm of that lofty fortitude which cares not for suffering when any good end is to be obtained, that Tertullian's boast was fully verified in this persecution. The faith of Christ was more widely spread during this reign than it had ever been before:—it was preached among the wild Goths and in some degree softened their ferocity: and in Gaul and Germany fresh churches were founded at Paris, Tours, Arles, Treves, Mentz, and other places.

An invasion of the Goths put a stop for a time to the persecution of the christians, the business of providing for the safety of the empire being too urgent to allow time for lesser affairs. Both Decius and his son fell in this war, and his successor Gallus, a man of dissolute habits, bribed the invaders to depart, in order that he might have leisure to indulge in licentious pleasures. The system of buying peace is but an invitation to a repetition of invasion, and the consequence was, that the fierce nations on the frontiers every where crossed the boundaries of the empire, plundering and destroy-

ing the country wherever they were able. Persia had thrown off the yoke of the Parthians, and again formed a powerful kingdom of that semi-barbarous kind which has always been found in Asia; and this people, as well as other bordering nations, had now learned from Romans, who occasionally took refuge among them, the art both of forging weapons and of using them: thus they were far more formidable enemies than heretofore.*

The wholesale slaughter in the insurrection at Alexandria already mentioned, had the consequence which in such a climate it was likely to produce: the plague made its appearance with tremendous violence, and desolated the city, so that as Dionysius, the christian bishop, writes, there were not so many inhabitants left of all ages, as heretofore

* The troops of Pescennius Niger, after he was defeated and slain by Severus, "passed the Tigris and went over to the barbarians, . . . which was the cause that after this they were more formidable enemies to the Romans in a close engagement. Before . . . they were ignorant of the use of heavy armour, and did not dare engage in close combat with spears and swords, . . . but the refugees having among them many artificers, they learned not only to use but to make arms."—*Herodian*. lib. iii. c. 4.

could be numbered between forty and seventy. In this emergency the persecuted christians forgot all but their Lord's precept, and were unwearied in their attendance on the sick; many perishing in the performance of this duty by taking the infection. "In this way," says the bishop, with touching simplicity, "the best of the brethren departed this life: some ministers, and some deacons," the heathens having abandoned their friends and relations to the care of the very persons whom they had been accustomed to call "men-haters."*

A like noble self-devotion was shown at Carthage when the pestilence which had desolated Alexandria made its appearance in that city, and,—I quote the words of a contemporary, "All fled in horror from the contagion, abandoning their relations and friends as if they thought that by avoiding the plague any one might also exclude death altogether. Meanwhile the city was strewed with the bodies, or rather carcasses of the dead, which seemed to call for pity from the passers by, who might themselves so soon share the same

* EUSEB. *Hist Ecc.* lib. vii. c. 22.

fate: but no one cared for any thing but miserable pelf; no one trembled at the consideration of what might so soon befall him in his turn; no one did for another what he would have wished others to do for him.—The bishop hereupon called together his flock, and setting before them the example and teaching of their Lord, called on them to act up to it. He said, that if they took care only of their own people they did but what the commonest feeling would dictate;—the servant of Christ must do more: he must love his enemies, and pray for his persecutors; for God made his sun to rise, and his rain to fall on all alike, and he who would be the child of God must imitate his Father.” The people responded to his appeal: they formed themselves into classes, and those whose poverty prevented them from doing more, gave their personal attendance, while those who had property aided yet further:—no one quitted his post but with his life.

The pestilence spread far and wide, partly from infection, and partly from miasmata; for the incursions of the barbarians, and the edict of Decius, which was renewed by his profligate successor, had caused a carnage which in many places tainted the atmosphere.

The contagion spread to most of the great cities of the empire, Rome itself not excepted, where at one time the deaths amounted as it is said to five thousand per diem. Antioch was taken and plundered by the Persians, who possessed themselves of all Mesopotamia; the Goths, the Borani, the Burgundi, and the Carpi plundered the cities of Europe; famine, the usual companion of war and pestilence, aided in depriving the empire of its strength; but Gallus knew nothing of all this till the appearance of a competitor roused him to march against him. The soldiery, judging both incompetent, murdered first the one, and then the other, and saluted Valerianus as Emperor. But the empire was so much enfeebled that the hostile incursions of the tribes inhabiting the region of the Ister continued without intermission, and in great measure without opposition: Chalcedon, Nicomedia, Nicæa, and many other wealthy and populous cities were taken and plundered by the barbarians:* the army of Valerianus was destroyed by the plague, and he himself,

* Zosimus calls them Scythians as a general term. It would appear that these wild tribes united their forces for the sake of plunder, and the Roman historian knew little of their real origin or country.

heartless and hopeless, endeavoured to buy the friendship of Sapor, the conquering king of Persia, by a large gift. A fatal step for him, for having trusted himself with a small retinue to hold a conference with Sapor, he was taken prisoner by the Persians, and kept in captivity: his son Gallienus assuming the sovereignty.

Valerianus at his first accession had endeavoured to strengthen his government by conciliating the christians, whom he treated with extraordinary favour; but as misfortunes thickened around him, he grew superstitious, had recourse to Egyptian soothsayers in order to read the future, and suffered himself to be induced by them to add yet another evil to those the empire was already suffering, by renewing the edict against the christians which he had at first suspended; as if the state could still afford to lose its best and bravest men.

At this time we must conclude that the number among the better classes who had either openly or secretly embraced the doctrines of christianity was very large; probably, nearly half: for we find the emperors alternately courting the heathen or the christian

party as circumstances dictated: much as in modern times, monarchs throw themselves into the arms of legitimacy or liberalism, whig or tory. It may be well, whilst the two parties were so nearly balanced, to take a short view of the state of manners among the heathen population as contrasted with the christian, and I shall again quote from the writings of a contemporary, the learned and accomplished bishop of Carthage already mentioned.* He thus writes to his friend Donatus.

* Thascius Cyprianus; a character too remarkable to be passed over without some further notice. He was born at Carthage, of heathen parents, and himself remained a heathen till within twelve years of his death: thinking, as he informs one of his friends in a letter which is still extant, that the difficulties in the way of a christian life were too great to be overcome. "How can a man already arrived at mature age," thought he, "change his whole life and habits; abandon vices rooted in his nature,—learn oeconomy and temperance when accustomed to luxury and dissipation; adopt a simple dress when he has been wont to be conspicuous in gold and purple? He who has loved and attained the honours of the state, can he abandon all for a private life? he who has thought it a pain to be alone, give up his bands of followers?—he who has grown up in licentiousness and intemperance, grow at once chaste and sober?"—He was, however, a man of a cultivated and strong mind, and the result of this long question and

“Imagine yourself raised above the earth, and looking down upon it, so as to perceive

struggle with himself was, that he embraced the faith whose precepts he had thought it so impossible to practise, and became one of the brightest examples of a truly christian life. The immediate instrument of his conversion was one Cecilius, a christian presbyter, whose name he adopted at his baptism, and whose wife and children he took into his own charge after the death of Cecilius. Cyprianus was a man of too much ability to remain long unnoticed; within two years of his conversion he was elected to the bishopric of Carthage: and although anxious to avoid so dangerous an elevation,—for in times of popular insurrection the bishops were usually more especially sought out for slaughter,—when the people insisted, he complied. It has already been seen how nobly he justified their choice. When the danger became imminent, he wisely withdrew from the city, though still keeping up constant communication with his flock, and herein set an example of quiet prudence which others would have done well to imitate. He thus escaped the persecution under Decius, and returned to Carthage when the edicts against the christians were suspended by Valerianus. He was however soon called upon to testify to his faith. The proconsul having summoned him before him thus addressed him.

“I have been honoured by a letter from the most sacred emperors Valerianus and Gallienus, by which they require that those who do not worship the Roman gods shall at least comply with the ceremonies. I have sent for you in consequence; what is your answer?”

Cyp. “I am a christian and a bishop. I know no other Deity than the One True God who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that therein is. This God

what is going forward there. . . . Behold the roads obstructed by bands of robbers; the sea

we christians serve : to Him we pray day and night for ourselves and all other men as well as for the safety of these very emperors—”

Pro. “Do you intend to remain in this mind?”

Cyp. “He who knows God cannot alter his mind.”

Pro. “Are you then ready to go into exile to Cu-rebes?”

Cyp. “I am ready to go.”

Pro. “The emperors have deigned to write to me not only respecting the bishop, but the presbyters also. I wish to know from you who they are?”

Cyp. “By your laws it is well and wisely ordained that no one shall follow the trade of an informer, I cannot therefore comply. They will be found in their place.”

Pro. “I make the demand.”

Cyp. “Our discipline forbids any one to sacrifice himself needlessly; but if you search for them they will be found.”

Pro. “I shall find them then,” adding, “The emperors have also commanded that no meeting of your people shall be held in any place; neither are you allowed to enter your cemeteries. If any one transgress this he shall be put to death.”

Cyp. “Do what is commanded you.”

Sentence of banishment was then pronounced. The next year the new proconsul finding that Cyprianus from his place of exile still corresponded with and directed the church, recalled him; and after some delays during which he was in some measure at liberty, he was again brought before the deputy of the emperor. “Are you Thascius Cyprianus?” enquired the functionary.

beset with pirates; war every where! The very earth is wet with blood, and what is

Cyp. "I am."

Pro. "You have suffered yourself to be made a chief of these men holding sacrilegious opinions?"

Cyp. "I have."

Pro. "The emperors have ordered you to perform the ceremonies."

Cyp. "I shall not."

Pro. "Think of your own safety."

Cyp. "Do what is commanded you. There is no room for thought in so clear a matter."

The proconsul then consulted with his council, and pronounced the following sentence. "You have lived a long time in impiety, and have conspired to pervert other men; constituting yourself the enemy of the Roman gods; so that the pious and most sacred emperors have been unable to recall you to the observance of the holy ceremonies. Therefore, as you are the author and leader of these great crimes, you shall be a warning to those whom you have associated with you in your wickedness. Your blood shall vindicate the law.—It is the pleasure of the court that Thascius Cyprianus be beheaded."

Cyp. "God be thanked."

He was followed by a crowd of believers desiring to be beheaded with their bishop and benefactor; for from the time he had embraced the christian faith he had bestowed the greater part of his substance on the destitute. It does not appear however that the orders of the proconsul extended to any but the chiefs of the christian congregations; and Cyprianus was allowed to be attended by his friends to the place of execution, where, with the calm courage of a man who knows in whom he

called murder when committed in private by a single individual, is virtue when it is done by many in public. Impunity being obtained not by the smallness but the magnitude of the offence. If you turn your eyes to the cities, there you will find their very greatness more offensive than the most wretched solitude. There gladiatorial shows are exhibited to gratify the lust of blood. The body is nourished with the strongest meats and the muscles brought out into the fullest development in order that the pampered animal may sell his life the dearer. Man is slaughtered for the pleasure of man, and he who best knows how to kill is the most skilful: it is a trade, an art;—the crime is not only perpetrated, but it is taught. What can be more inhuman, and what bitterer thing can we say of society? They combat with beasts not as crimi-

has trusted, after having presented the executioner with twenty pieces of gold, he submitted to the sentence. His body was buried with much pomp by the christians; and without opposition from the heathen population. Perhaps, at this last moment, they might remember that the same quiet resolution had faced the terrors of the contagion from which all but christians fled; and some regret might mingle with the curiosity which brought crowds of the heathens to witness his execution.

nals, but from brute fury: sons behold their father, the sister sees the brother in the amphitheatre. . . .

“Turn your eyes now to spectacles of another kind, not less lamentably corrupting. In the theatre . . . the parricide and incest of anti-quity are reproduced in all their horror, lest the memory of any crime should wear out. . . . You may next please your eyes with the comic actor—the schoolmaster of crime. . . . Adultery is learned by seeing it acted,* and the theatre panders to vice by public authority, till the matron who goes thither modest returns immodest. What a stain upon morals, what an incitement to evil, what food for vice is to be found in the gestures of the actors, when they undertake to represent the whole course of sensual passion! They acquire praise in proportion as they are criminal, and he is the most skilful who is the most indecent! and all this is gazed at, oh shame!—willingly gazed at!—What crime will such a spectacle not suggest?—Find me, if you can, the person who can be present at such repre-

* *Mimicis adulteris ea quæ solent simulato fieri, effici ad verum jussit (i. e. Elagabalus.)* ÆL. LAMPRID. *Heliogab. Vit. c. 25.*

sentations, and remain chaste.—Could' you now from your elevation look into the retirement of the closed chamber, and see what is there transacted, . . . but your eyes would be defiled by beholding it. . . .

“Perhaps now after viewing the snares set for travellers both by sea and land;—the multiplied slaughters;—the public exhibitions whether cruel or indecent;—the detestable scenes enacted, either in the public receptacles of vice, or in the retirement of home, where the crime being more secret, is perpetrated with greater audacity;—you will look to the forum, and fancy this at least free from stain. Turn thither:—you will find yet more to detest, and will turn away your eyes in disgust. There, though the laws are engraved in brass, and hung up before the eyes of the public, we see those very laws broken; and innocence, even there, has no refuge. The rage of the contending parties knows no bounds; peace is broken even among the men of the toga, and the forum resounds with the noise of their mad disputes. There too the spear, the sword, and the executioner, are always ready at hand, to tear off the nails, to apply the rack, or the red-hot iron; and the body of one man is

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made to suffer more tortures than it has limbs. And who is there, mean time, to render any assistance? the patron? he prevaricates and deceives! The judge? he sells his sentence! every kind of crime abounds; this man produces a supposititious will;—that one, a false register;—here children are deprived of their inheritance; there the property is alienated. The enemy of some one feigns a crime—a calumniator impleads, and a false witness renders him infamous. Every where audacious and venal tongues assail the guiltless with lying imputations; and the really guilty escape while the innocent suffer. There is no fear of the laws,—none of the public prosecutor,—none of the judge; for he who can buy his acquittal has no cause of dread. To be innocent is a crime among criminals; for the bad are offended if any one refuses to imitate them. The laws themselves consent to guilt; and what is publicly done, soon begins to be considered lawful. What vestige of integrity, or what shame can exist when none remain to condemn wrong doers?—”

This is a fearful picture, and it would have been still more disgusting had it been possible to translate the whole: but what was then

done openly and without shame, cannot now be spoken of without offence; and it is well that it should be so, even though it be attended with one disadvantage; namely that the generality of readers have but a very imperfect knowledge of the state of the heathen world; and consequently hardly know how much they owe to those brave men who at the hazard of their lives taught a holier and nobler faith.

Heavy taxation had already made Roman supremacy unpopular in the provinces; tyranny over the mind was yet more insupportable, and as soon as the captivity of Valerianus and the vices of his son had made the government of Rome despicable as well as oppressive, Gaul revolted, and for fourteen years maintained its independence under different chiefs. The historians of the empire are so silent as to the state of the provinces that it is difficult to find even a few lines to tell the changes in progress there, and it is only owing to the indignation of Trebellius Pollio at the supineness of Gallienus,* that we have any mention of a

* "I have studiously held Gallienus up to ridicule by placing him between two women," says this writer :

noble lady in Gaul who was the chief mover in the attempt to free her country from the yoke of the stranger. Victorina, who refused the title of Augusta, and chose to describe herself on her coins as *Mater Castrorum*, had riches, skill and discernment enough, both to place whom she chose upon the throne of Gaul, and to select men capable of the charge.* Tetricus, the last who held this dignity, was not vanquished till the Mother

thus giving voice to a heathen prejudice which, shame upon us christians who have been so slow to learn the lesson of our Lord! is not yet wholly eradicated. The two women by whose juxta-position a Gallienus was to be dishonoured, were Victorina, "The Mother of the Camps," who had freed her country but refused empire herself, and Zenobia, the wise and accomplished queen of Palmyra, who had also rendered her country independent, and who when attacked by Aurelianus, the greatest general that Rome had produced for ages, with all the force of the empire, kept him at bay long enough to make him deem it the proudest of his triumphs to have conquered her.

* "While Gallienus was spending his time in vice and luxury," says Trebellius Pollio, "and only governed the state as children do when playing at being king, the Gauls, to whom it is natural to be light-minded and little attached to the Roman rule, when exercised by effeminate and luxurious princes, called Posthumus to the government . . . and for seven years, during which he reigned, he defended the country valiantly from the invasions of the barbarians."

of the Camps was no more—as some say, sacrificed by him to his own base ambition. If it were so he soon paid the penalty of his ungrateful treachery, for he was vanquished and led in triumph by Aurelianus, upon which Gaul again fell under the dominion of Rome.

The faith of the heathen world in its own mythology, if indeed it ever had existed, had long ago become extinct; the priests of the temples cared for the emolument they derived from them, the people liked the pompous ceremonies and the riotous festivals which their worship enjoined, but none *believed*. All that remained was that feeling of unseen existences or forces, which man never entirely loses; and which, when not guided in the right direction by an enlightened religious system, or a pure philosophy, degenerates into the grossest superstition. Prodigies were believed in by the vulgar, and all nature was peopled by their imaginations with fantastic beings whose agency accounted for all events not of every-day occurrence. Though the ancient faith in the One Supreme Power who remained throned in invisible majesty, and of whom no image was

permitted,* had decayed, and a set of poetical fictions had been allowed to take its place, these last had never taken root in the minds of the people; they were received rather as an amusement than as a faith, and the heart and the reason remained alike unsatisfied. It was while this state of feeling prevailed that the religion of Christ, with all its ennobling motives and lofty consolations, was presented to mankind. It was water to the traveller in the desert.—Men saw in it the development of all that is great in human nature, and, for the first time since the golden age of Greek philosophy, they were in earnest. Even where Christianity was not fully received, we find a pure theism beginning to take the place of superstition, as in the case of the great queen of Palmyra, who is said to have taken up the opinions of the bishop of Antioch, commonly called Paul of Samosata, who held that Jesus was born a mere man, but afterwards for his excellence united to the Deity. Athanasius calls both the bishop and his patroness,

* It has already been noticed, in the course of these works, that in more ancient times no image of the Deity was made.

Jews;* but from his account of the doctrine taught by him, it would rather appear that they were more properly what are now called Unitarian Christians. Of the same persuasion probably was the celebrated Longinus, the tutor and friend of this illustrious princess.†

* **ATHAN.** *Hist. Arianorum*, c. 71. See also *Oratio cont. Arianos*.

† His quotation from the book of *Genesis*, in his work on *The Sublime*, is well known. It shows a closer study of the Hebrew Scriptures than was likely to have been bestowed on them by a mere heathen philosopher. It was probably the christianity of Zenobia which excited the ill-nature of Zosimus, a bitter enemy of the christians, to charge her with a weak treachery towards Longinus which is neither in keeping with her character, nor in accordance with other historians of that time, but which has been thoughtlessly copied by modern writers. Zosimus charges her with having pleaded before Aurelianus that she “being but a weak woman,”—the proud Zenobia a weak woman!—“Longinus had misled her by bad counsels.” and adds, that Longinus was put to death in consequence; and that she herself shortly after perished by shipwreck, or for want of food, and never reached Rome. This is contradicted by both Trebellius Pollio and Flavius Vopiscus, who both lived nearer the time and describe the triumph of Aurelianus, where both she and Tetricus were exhibited among the captives. Aurelianus himself in a letter to the senate sufficiently describes the character of this very remarkable woman. “I hear, Conscript Fathers,” says he, “that some have thought it an unmanly act to triumph over

The persecution of the christians was suspended by Gallienus as soon as he became sole emperor ; but his reign of fifteen years was in all other respects disastrous and disgraceful ; and when Claudius assumed the government, nothing could exceed the state of disorganization in which he found both the army and the empire.* His vigorous rule was followed by the reigns of Aurelianus, Tacitus, Probus, and

Zenobia. But those who now blame would praise me enough if they knew what this woman is : how prudent in council, how firm in character ; how wise in her conduct towards her army ; how liberal when occasion called for it : how stern when severity was required. I can say for a certainty that it was owing to her that Odenatus (her husband) vanquished the Persians, and pursued Sapor to the very walls of Ctesiphon. I can affirm that the whole people of the East and of Egypt so dreaded the displeasure of this woman, that neither Arabs, Saracens, nor Armenians dared to move : nor would I have spared her life but that I knew how much she had done for Rome in time past when she preserved the sovereignty of the East for herself or her children.”—V. TREB. POLL. *de Zenobia*.

* He writes thus in a letter to the senate penned just before engaging a force of three hundred and twenty thousand Goths who had poured in a body into the empire. “If I vanquish them you will appreciate what I have done : if I do not, remember that I have to fight after the reign of Gallienus. The empire is exhausted : there are no shields, swords, or spears in store ;—Gaul and Spain—the great strength of the republic—are in the

Carus, all men of ability, and under their management the empire, although hard pressed by the barbarians, regained something of its power.

The christians were now recognised as an established corporate body. When Paul of Samosata, bishop of Antioch, contumaciously refused to submit to the censure of his brother bishops, they applied to the emperor Aurelianus, who at once took cognizance of the affair, and decreed his deposition ; ordering the bishops of Italy to choose another to supply his place. Towards the close of this emperor's reign, indeed, for some cause which does not appear,* the christians fell under his displeasure, and he was about to renew the edict against them ; but before he had published it, he was assassinated by his own officers, and from this time till A. D. 303, they enjoyed

hands of Tetricus ; our archers are retained by Zenobia." He however entirely defeated this overwhelming force. See TREB. POLL. *Claudii Vit.*

* If Victorina and Zenobia were both christians, as seems in the latter case tolerably certain, and in the former probable, it might lead the conqueror of Palmyra and of Gaul to suspect that the christian community at large was not likely to be well affected towards his government.

peace, and favour even. The profession of christianity was now no longer a hindrance to the taking office : governors of **provinces, and officers of the palace** were chosen from among them ; stately churches were built and endowed for the reception of the increasing number of converts ; and the bishops were every where treated with high respect.

When Carus died, and his son Numerianus was treacherously murdered by his father-in-law, Diocletianus was captain of the imperial guard ; and the soldiers, on discovering the death of the young emperor, immediately invested him with the purple. He was a man of low origin ; as some say, the son of a slave, and, though a person of much skill in the military art, illiterate. One commander was insufficient for the defence of the empire, pressed as it was on all sides ; and the following year he took for his colleague in the imperial dignity his former comrade and intimate friend Maximianus : a man, like himself, of low origin and great military skill, but far less capable as far as civil government was concerned.

For a time the empire enjoyed tranquillity under their administration ; but some years

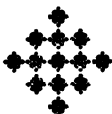
after, disturbances having again broken out in the provinces, the two emperors felt themselves unequal to the emergency and called two more commanders to their assistance by the title of Cæsars. Maximianus chose Constantius, surnamed Chlorus, whom at the same time he required to repudiate his wife in order to take in her room one connected with the imperial family, and Diocletianus in like manner chose Maximinus Galerius, who was also constrained to marry Valeria Galeria the daughter of his patron. Thus the empire was divided into four parts, where each sovereign reigned with independent authority, though the two Cæsars were considered as inferior in rank. They were for the most part successful in their military operations, and restored peace to the empire; but the maintenance of four courts greatly increased the expenditure, and with it increased also the already heavy imposts under which the provinces suffered. Constantius* alone, who reigned over Gaul

* It is related by Eusebius that Diocletianus having once sent to remonstrate with him on the empty state of the treasury, he detained the emperor's ambassadors, and sending round convoked the most wealthy of his subjects. When they arrived he told them that now was the time

and the adjacent countries, appears to have spared his people, and to have enjoyed in consequence an unbounded popularity.

to show their love for him : he wanted money, and requested them to supply him. They retired, and very shortly the treasury was filled by their liberal contributions. Constantius then called in the ambassadors : showed them the amount of wealth there collected, and told them that in ordinary times he was wont to leave it in the safe keeping of his subjects, knowing he could have it whenever he needed it. The envoys were no sooner gone than he sent for the persons who had thus supplied him, and restored the whole.

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CHAPTER V.

CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE AND CUSTOMS DURING THE THIRD CENTURY.

FOUR or five generations had now passed away since the gospel was proclaimed to the world, and the last of those who could refer to personal or even traditional recollection of the apostles of Christ, were dead. The religion they had taught was become a system, to be gathered rather from their writings than from their personal teaching: and though their writings must have been better understood then, when the customs of the people to whom they were addressed were in great measure unaltered; still the want of any apostolic man to whom the churches might appeal in cases of difficulty, was beginning to be deeply felt. Even in the time of Clement of Alexandria, who wrote about the end of the second century and the beginning of the third, the christian community was not what it had

been. Those whom he addresses appear to have lived in great luxury, and he reproaches them for giving the title of *agapæ** to their expensive and select dinner parties. Much of his *Pædagogus* is devoted to the pointing out those habits of the heathen which the christian must not imitate ; and from the terms he uses, it would seem that these cautions were not uncalled for.

The quiet enjoyed by the christians from the accession of Caracalla to that of Decius, a period of thirty-nine years,—with the short exception of the year during which Maximinus held the sovereign power,—tended to encourage this love of luxury in those who, having been baptized in their infancy, were christians less from conviction than habit: and when the edict of Decius was published, and torture, confiscation and death were held up as the punishment of those who refused to conform to the state religion, great numbers,—terrified by the prospect, and by the examples, which were studiously made public, of the barbarities

* *αγαπαι* or *agapæ* were so called from their being meals partaken of by the christian brotherhood, where the poor and rich sat down to one common table, and partook of the same fare. See No. VII.

inflicted on such as remained firm in their profession of christianity,—consented to sacrifice; not at all abandoning their faith, but not having courage to avow it. They came to the altar, says Eusebius, more dead than alive, pale, trembling, and having the appearance of being themselves the sacrifices. Those who thus fell were called *Lapsi*. Others, afterwards stigmatized as *Libellatici*, purchased for a sum of money, a false certificate from the magistrates that the bearer of it had complied with the law, i. e. sacrificed, to be produced if he were ever called in question; hoping thus equally to avoid the penalty of the right or the wrong doing: for those who sacrificed were thenceforward excluded from the christian community, and were disqualified from partaking of any christian rite. This was no ordinary grief to persons who saw themselves thus shut out from salvation: for by this time an inordinate degree of efficacy began to be attributed to the sacraments of the church. Baptism which was considered as the washing away of all former sins, could not be repeated; this great sin against God their Saviour remained therefore uneffaced and uneffaceable, unless the sinner could obtain reconciliation

by participation in the eucharist. This reconciliation was in consequence sought with an eagerness which has no parallel in modern times; and a penance of six, seven, or even more years, during which the penitents stood at the door of the church, lamenting their sin, bathed in tears, and imploring the prayers of the faithful,—was often required and endured.

Eusebius records an instance of an aged man, previously of irreproachable character and conduct, who in time of persecution failed in courage, and sacrificed. He was accordingly excluded from the church, and though he had often with bitter grief entreated to be readmitted to the christian communion, his prayer was disregarded. At last he fell sick, and after having lain speechless and insensible for three days, suddenly recovered himself enough to speak. Hereupon he called to him a young lad, his nephew, and complaining that he could not die till he was absolved, bade him call the nearest presbyter: after which he sunk back into stupor. The priest himself being also confined to his bed by illness, sent the consecrated elements by the boy, telling him to dip the bread in the wine and put a portion into the mouth of his uncle. The old man on hear-

ing his nephew return roused himself once more, bade him be quick and do what the priest commanded in order that he might be able to depart ; received a portion of the bread and wine, and instantly expired. A feeling which could thus arrest the progress of death must have been strong indeed !

In proportion as the courage to bear torture was rare, the martyrs were held in honour by their contemporaries ; and to these, whilst in prison—either under sentence of death, or remanded to await a renewal of torture—the penitents resorted, entreating their intercession with the church. It was hardly possible under such circumstances to refuse it ; for who better knew than he who had just wrought up his own courage to the requisite firmness, how hard a struggle it cost ;—how the flesh winced, and the mind sank under the extremity of suffering ?—and he could hardly avoid pitying those whose only fault had been the want of courage. The “ letters of peace ” therefore were freely given, even at last to the point of abusing the privilege ; for the martyrs, exhausted with their own sufferings, had small inclination or perhaps means to inquire into circumstances : and the *libelli pacis*, as they were

termed, were given not only to those who applied in person, but to all their friends; and sometimes to those who were suffering under excommunication, not for sacrificing merely, but for moral offences. This occasioned a remonstrance from Cyprianus, bishop of Carthage,* but the numbers of the *Lapsi* and their influence was so great that finally all order was disregarded, and the people rising in sedition compelled several presbyters by threats and violence to administer the eucharist to all without exception.†

On the other hand a stricter party in the church objected to the receiving the *Lapsi* into communion at all, and Novatus, a presbyter of Carthage as it would seem, having put himself at their head, a schism was created which lasted down to the first council of Nikæa. Among this very strict party even the endeavour to avoid death by flight was held cowardly and unworthy; and the consequent neglect of the salutary caution which might

* His letters, which have been preserved to the present time, give us large details as to what passed at Carthage. The same was probably going on elsewhere in a greater or less degree.

† CYP. *Ep.* xxii. edit. Gautier Parigii, 1836.

be gathered from the words "lead us not into temptation," often led the too confident christian into the abandonment of his faith. Cyprianus, whose courageous martyrdom has been already noticed, thought differently; and withdrew from the city when the cry was raised in the amphitheatre of "Cyprianus to the lions." Possibly it was in disdain of a head of the church who was not enthusiastic, that Novatus ventured to set at nought the authority of his bishop by ordaining a deacon without his sanction. Of course, when Cyprianus returned to Carthage this irregularity was noticed; Novatus was censured, fled to Rome, and there joined himself to a certain Novatianus, and persuaded three bishops from the country, "simple, ignorant men," it is said, to consecrate him a bishop. Hence the sect of the Novatians.

The strong feeling in the church on the subject of the *Lapsi*, led to the establishment of a new office; namely, priests who were commissioned to receive the confession of such as had fallen from the faith, and to appoint the due penance after proper consideration and inquiry, which after a persecution in which so many had incurred different degrees of guilt

in this respect, became almost a business by itself. Every day shows us that offices instituted for a particular purpose are rarely abolished, even after the cause has ceased altogether; and this practice of confession was not laid aside when persecution ceased. It was, however, forbidden altogether by Nectarius, bishop of Constantinople, in the next century, on account of a scandal which had arisen in the church in consequence of it,* and was not revived till christian doctrine and practice had undergone great changes at a much later period.†

The persecution of the christians under Decius differed from all previous ones: before this they were either found guilty of some offence against existing laws, and punished accordingly; or they were the victims of some lawless outbreak on the part of the populace; but the mere profession of Christianity had not till this reign been made a legal crime. Now, however, there was no escape but death or

* SOCRAT. *Hist. Ecc.* lib. v. c. 20.

† In the council of Lateran, A.D. 1215, under the papacy of Innocent III. it was declared heretical to suppose that confession to God was sufficient without confession also to a priest.

flight, from tortures and degradations which were far worse than loss of life. Noble ladies in some instances preferred a voluntary death to the brutal insults which awaited them if they refused to abandon their faith ; others, men as well as women, when unable to escape from their torturers, sacrificed rather than submit to such humiliation. Many more fled into deserts and forests, and there perished from hunger and privations, or were devoured by wild beasts : while some who were more fortunate, found a home in caverns or other wild spots where they lived on what they could gather from the earth, or from the charity of their fellows : and thus began the eremitical life, which afterwards grew into such high esteem. At first it was a necessity ; —the desert and the wild were their only refuge from the cruelty and tyranny of man ; and those who fled thither under such circumstances, suffered hardships gladly, if they could but hold fast their faith unmolested ; and in prayer, and meditation on a better world, found support under the evils of this. They were thoroughly in earnest ; the excitement of the imagination which such times produce, frequently lent them a further support

in visions and dreams of which we have frequent relations; and when the necessity for concealment was over, in many instances the anchorite had become so accustomed to the liberty of his wild life that he did not wish to quit it: he knew not how long the calm might last, had no ties left, perhaps, to draw him back to society, and preferred remaining where he was. Perhaps the respect with which he was viewed by the rest of the christian community, who considered him as standing next in rank to a martyr,—also had its weight: for vanity not unfrequently nestles close in the human heart beside its higher motives; and the holy man, already an enthusiast, added to the austerity of his life when it was needless, because it had been admired when it was necessary; till he began to confound the worth of the cause with that of the effect, and equalised the two in his imagination till finally he studied means of mortification, as if there were something substantially meritorious in the very act of endurance. A little later we shall see the hermits of the Thebais almost abandoning the distinctive characters of man, and thinking that they drew nearer to heaven merely by

making themselves unfit for the common relations of earthly life.*

Of all the mistakes which men have made, none is more fatal than that of imagining it meritorious to cast away needlessly the comforts which God has placed around us. Can the Judge of all the earth do wrong?—and wrong it would be to give tastes and the means of gratifying them, unless the moderate use of them were at least harmless. But it is more than that;—it is beneficial;—for man grows hard under hardships; and he never is all that he was intended to be till his heart is softened by some quiet enjoyment,—some gentle affections. We shall see in the sequel the fatal consequences of this mistake: here our concern is only with its origin.

Another of these mistakes, which also grew out of circumstances, and which at a later period had likewise much of evil consequence, had its rise nearly at the same time, or perhaps a little earlier: I mean, an overstrained reverence for a state of celibacy; but for

* Many of them went naked, crept on all fours, and were so deformed by dirt and neglect that they might be mistaken for wild beasts.

the origin of this I must go back rather farther.

All who are conversant with the manners of Greece and Rome at the time when the gospel was first promulgated, will be aware that the undisguised grossness of the relations between the two sexes was such, that to a christian accustomed to the promise "the pure in heart shall see God" nothing could have been more revolting. The refinements of modern society which are but the gilded counterfeit of real christian holiness, shrink from what was then the tone even of the least corrupt: we may guess, then, what were the feelings of a christian maiden with regard to marriage with a heathen, where the very rites observed were an offence against decency. In such a state of things it is no matter of wonder that many should prefer even comparative poverty; and choose rather to spend their lives in charitable ministrations, which the Saviour had promised to receive as if done to himself. Nay, even if the disgust inspired by the heathen rites were avoided by a holier union between christians, still the uncertainty of life and property under the capricious rule of any tyrant whom the soldiery might se-

lect, and whose will was law, might well make prudent persons hesitate ere they encumbered themselves with a family, in "the present distress." "He that giveth his virgin in marriage doeth well," says the apostle, "but he that giveth her not in marriage, doeth better."*

A woman, and still more a man who could live chastely, was a kind of miracle among the heathen; nor is this wonderful when we consider what were the spectacles constantly exhibited: the early christians, therefore, felt an honest pride in pointing to the many among the followers of Christ who lived in the purity he had required, notwithstanding that from various motives they might choose a life of celibacy. Whatever is rare is valued; and this, the rarest of all virtues among polytheists, came thus to be placed, after a time, at the head of christian graces, although it be but one of many equally imperative duties: and thus celibacy, which, like the eremitical life, was at first a matter of prudential choice, grew at last to be held in honour as an absolute virtue. The heathen converts too, who had been accustomed to see the vestal virgins

* 1 *Cor.* vii. 38.

treated with extraordinary respect, transferred somewhat of the same reverence to the maidens who embraced a single life among their own community: the dress they should wear became a matter of controversy among grave preachers,* their position was one of the highest honour, and thus vanity and the love of distinction by degrees came to have a part in the choice of this mode of life. But the moment that vanity enters the mind, christian virtue departs. What is done to be seen of men is no longer the service of God; and we soon find that much scandal arose in the church in consequence of the lax manners of many who ostentatiously professed to lead a life of purity.†

* See TERTULL. *de Virginib. Veland.* His eagerness to enforce the use of veils as a matter of perpetual obligation, because the apostle had recommended it to the female converts of Greece, where it was considered discreditable to appear without one,—is almost ludicrous.

† Cyprianus, bishop of Carthage, addresses the virgins of his own church in terms of much indignation, and not undeservedly, on account of their indecorous conduct: indeed without a complete separation from heathen society it was impossible that it should be otherwise. “I will not pass over,” says he, “those things not in accordance with modesty and sobriety which, through negligence,

In the last century the bishop of Rome had begun to claim some jurisdiction over his brother bishops with regard to the observance of the feast of Easter, but by the intervention of Irenæus, bishop of Lyons, christian brotherhood had been maintained, notwithstanding small variations in opinion among different communities on minor points. In this century the pretension was received with more obstinacy by Stephanus, who held the bishopric

are becoming common. Some of you are not ashamed to be present at nuptials, and add their aid to the lascivious license of words then allowed. They hear what is not decent to be heard,—say what is not decent to be said, and are present at, and listen to the obscene conversation of the drunken company . . . What business has she there whose life is to be so different?—What is there learnt,—seen?—She may arrive there modest, she goes away immodest.—And what shall I say of those who frequent promiscuous baths?—who display their consecrated persons uncovered, to the immodest gaze of the curious?—who among men, and with men, see and are seen indecently? . . . You make a theatre of the bath, where worse sights are exhibited than even in the theatre . . . all delicacy is laid aside with the dress. . . . Consider, I pray you, whether, even when you shall again be clothed, you can appear amongst these men as a modest maiden? Thus the church frequently laments over its virgins, and groans over the infamous tales which are told of them.”—Cyp. *de Habitu Virginum*, c. 3.

of Rome from A.D. 254 to A.D. 257. A question had arisen in the church as to whether those who had received baptism at the hands of heretics, ought to be rebaptized on renouncing their errors, and entering into the communion of the universal church. Cyprianus of Carthage, and Firmilianus of Cæsarea in Cappadocia, with the other bishops of Africa and Asia, contended warmly that those who had never received baptism in the orthodox church ought to be rebaptized on entering it. Stephanus, on the contrary, maintained that baptism from whatever hands, was equally valid, and endeavoured to compel the obedience of his brother bishops to this mandate; an attempt which caused great indignation, and is thus commented on by Firmilianus. "Those at Rome have not always held truly what they received from the beginning, and pretend vainly to the authority of the apostles as may be known from this, that with regard to the feast of Easter and many other things they have adopted customs different from those of the church of Jerusalem: indeed, in other provinces also, there are considerable variations on such matters without causing any division in the unity of the

church. But Stephanus has broken that peace with regard to you (the African province) which his predecessors had so carefully guarded. . . . And here I must mark my indignation at the manifest folly of Stephanus . . . who sets up pretensions to be the successor of Peter (the stone) on which the foundations of the church are laid, but in the mean time brings in many other stones . . . by admitting the authority of their (the heretics') baptism." And then, after quoting *Eph.* iv. 1-3, he complains with much asperity that Stephanus had in every way disregarded the apostle's injunction; both by his undue pretensions, and by his conduct towards the bishops who had been sent to him from the provinces to remonstrate with him on his unreasonable conduct; for he had not only refused to hold any communication with them himself, but forbade any one to show them common hospitality. Yet this man who could so little control his own passionate and ambitious temper, suffered death courageously for the faith whose precepts he had broken without much scruple! One more proof, if any were wanting, that physical courage is no measure of christian virtue. Many a man has

met death unflinchingly who had not resolution enough to master a captious temper: and it was an evil day for christianity when admiration of the stern fortitude exhibited by the martyrs superseded that which had before been given to the gentler virtues. One act of dogged courage will not alter the character; and if this life be but the school for the future, in which the soul, during its advance to maturity, is intended to acquire the habits of thought and feeling which shall fit it for a participation in Divine felicity, then, in spite of the immoderate admiration with which the sufferers for the faith were viewed by their contemporaries, we must decide that though it is good to die like a christian, it is far better to live like one, and that such a death can only be valuable when it is the close of such a life. Nay, we may perhaps go farther, and say that this great mistake of classing physical courage among virtues, which is common to all barbarous nations, a mistake which was especially remarkable among the nations of antiquity,* went further than any other

* The *αρετη* of the Greeks and the *virtus* of the Romans, which signified both virtue and courage, show what their notion of virtue was: and the old taint of

single cause towards the deterioration in the character of christians which was already beginning to be felt.

The history of christianity is in fact little else than a treatise on psychology. In the course of it we shall find every attribute of the human mind brought out in all its force, for its doctrines had power to stir the heart to its inmost recesses; and it is only by considering this peculiarity that the events to be related become thoroughly intelligible. Let man be once completely persuaded that he is immortal, and the *interests* of this short mortal life sink into comparative insignificance, while its *duties* rise in importance; and among those in whom this feeling is fresh and enthusiastic, there is no limit to the generous self-devotion which it engenders: but enthusiasm has more of emotion than of reason in its nature, and when once the passions are awakened, the fiercer ones will generally prevail. Thus it was that those who could throw away their lives as nothing when the sick of the plague were to be tended, were stern and harsh

heathenism is hardly yet obliterated. In common society, physical, and not moral, bravery is the object of praise.

when contending for what they considered the true doctrine against heretical opinions: and thus too, when passion got the start of reason, the eminently rational system which Christ had taught, became deteriorated as time wore on.

The human mind is so instinctively imitative, and learns goodness so much better by seeing others practise it, than by hearing them talk of it, that while His example was fresh in men's recollection, the virtues which had been conspicuous in him appeared lovely and practicable; but when this remembrance faded, and his precepts alone remained, another instinctive feeling, arising out of man's double nature, took the place of the human affection, which, in truth, was the safest guide of the two. Curiosity with regard to unseen things, and an endeavour to grasp and systematize what man's finite faculties could never fully embrace, led to an infinite variety of opinions upon abstruse points, which were opposed with bitterness by those who believed them to be errors; and with the more bitterness in proportion to the importance of the subject: till christians forgot the distinguishing mark of their profession, i. e. love towards each

other,—in their anxiety lest their Master's dignity should be compromised, or his doctrines misunderstood. Clement of Alexandria is the last writer in whom I find the personal example of Jesus referred to: and though it is not to be inferred from this that it did not enter into men's consideration, it may be taken as a proof that it was placed in a less prominent point of view: and with it the great object of the Christian Dispensation, i. e. that of bringing the human race back to the recognition of their Maker and restoring their own moral dignity, through the agency of the gentler human affections, by making one who was to all appearance a man, their guide and instructor. This mistake has borne bitter fruit from that down to our own age: the obvious and practical part of christianity has been neglected for the mysterious and abstruse, and men have thought verily that they did God service by bitter disputes and cruel persecutions of those who sometimes were less in error than themselves. We shall see more of this as we go on.

As it is no part of my intention to write an ecclesiastical history,—a thing obviously impossible within the bounds I have pre-

scribed to myself; I shall not attempt to give an account of the almost numberless sects which have arisen out of christianity: the answer to the question of why and how they arose is more german to my purpose. It has been too much the custom to look at their founders in the light of men who wilfully forsook the truth in order to make themselves a name, and gain distinction as the apostles of new doctrines; but this is not a fair view of the case. The converts to christianity were taken from all nations; and were frequently men arrived at maturity with many of the prejudices and feelings of their youth still hanging about them. In their opinions with regard to the *actual* nature of the Deity, a subject on which the scripture gives but little light, says Beausobre, "they followed sometimes the notions of their first instructor in the faith: sometimes that of the school of philosophy in which they had been educated. An Epicurean who embraced the faith was disposed to clothe the divinity in a human form and to define it like Epicurus, to be *an immortal and happy animal*. A Platonist, on the contrary, according to his master's views, maintained God to be *incorporeal*. A

Pythagorean, a follower of Empedocles or of Heracleitus, considered the Deity as *an intelligent fire or light*," &c.* and these various opinions which none could so entirely disprove as to silence their advocates, gave rise to sect after sect, which had enough of plausibility to satisfy men not trained to the close reasoning of more modern times: for nothing is more remarkable in the writings of both heathens and christians at this period, than the weakness of the arguments sometimes employed. Thus a heresiarch was frequently strengthened in his error by finding that his opponents had no stronger reasoning than his own to bring against him; and those whose early education had given the same bent to their minds, naturally became his followers; the more obstinately so, when they found themselves opposed by ecclesiastical censures and hard names rather than by rational arguments, urged with christian patience and forbearance. Thus it was that Manes, who was a Persian, endeavoured to mingle the doctrine of Zoroaster and that of Christ together, in

* BEAUSOBRE, *Hist. Crit. de Manichee*, tom. i. p. 474.

order to account for the origin of evil;* that Paul of Samosata, unable to imagine the Deity passing through the degradation of earthly life, affirmed that the man Jesus received the

* Not only Manes but many of the other heresiarchs of this time appear to have embraced that part of the Magian doctrine: God, light, or the Good Principle was, according to them, the eternal and active cause of creation. Matter, darkness, or the Evil Principle, was no less eternal; but inert and passive. It was only when this was brought into form and activity that its inherent unintelligence produced positive evil: till then it had had a possible, but not an actual existence. Let those who have ever been enough in earnest to wish to know the grounds of their faith, say, if the impossibility of ever destroying any particle of what we call matter has never puzzled them; and if the moral order of the universe has never offered any difficulties to their minds. If they can *bond fide* say that it has not, they are in a condition to cast the first stone at Manes and his brother heretics:—but if otherwise, let us judge with charity of mistakes so easily made, so difficult to set right. The orthodox of the time accused these persons of teaching the doctrine of two Gods, because, said they, what is eternal must be God: but if the heretic was illogical in his argument, he was at least correct in his practice, for he gave no worship to this unintelligent principle. It would have been far better for mankind, and more in accordance with the teaching of the Saviour, if all matters of speculative philosophy had been left as open questions on which the wit of man might exercise itself freely as long as the eminently practical precepts of Christ were duly observed, and his example was made the rule of life.

union with the Divine Being as a reward for his exemplary life;*—that Sabellius, convinced by the words of Scripture that Christ was God, taught the unity of the Deity in terms so strong that he was supposed to maintain that the Father of all things actually suffered on the cross.† Probably none of these,

* It escaped him probably that a complete union with the Deity is a thing impossible to any less perfect nature. If I may be allowed to attempt a definition of anything so little within the reach of man's comprehension, I would say that the Deity is an intelligent *force* consisting of certain qualities, without individual substance: as in physics we say gravitation is a force having certain qualities, but not a substance. Now where there is no substance there can be no union but that of a similarity of qualities, by which one is, as it were, absorbed into the other.—And Christ himself terms his body "this temple," i.e. a place where the Deity was specially manifested, and from whence his will was made known,—but by no means speaks of it as united to the Deity, "Destroy this temple and in three days *I* will raise *it* up."

† "When the Sabellians," says Epiphanius, "meet the orthodox, they say to them, 'Friends, do we believe in one God or in three?' which shows that they quitted the catholic faith merely because they thought that it established three Gods: Origen assures us that 'these sectarians, who were very numerous, professed to love God, and only professed to give him glory.'—'They feared,' says Eusebius, 'to introduce a second God.' Such was the origin of Sabellianism, its nature was this: Sabellius conceived God to be one person only, of which

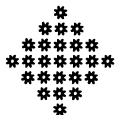
nor many more whom I cannot find space to mention, ever really believed any of the things which their adversaries imputed to them;

the Logos was the Reason or Wisdom, and of which the Holy Spirit is the power . . . Epiphonius tells us that the Sabellians compared the Deity to the sun, in which may be distinguished, 1st, The substance or body of the sun, 2nd, the power of giving light, 3rd, the power of warming and animating. Jesus the son of Mary (according to them) is the Son of God, because he was conceived of the Holy Spirit, and because the Logos or Wisdom of God which is always in Him, because it is his inseparable attribute, exerted its power in the person of Jesus in order to reveal to him the truths which he was in his turn to reveal to men and to endue him with the power necessary in order to confirm his words by miracles. . . . The union of the Divine Logos with the person of Jesus is not a *substantial union* but one of *power only*: thus the Sabellians acknowledge no hypostatic union of the Divine Essence with the human nature of Jesus Christ. It was only an operation of the Divinity, a complete effusion of the divine Wisdom and Power in the soul of the Lord.”—BEAUSOBRE, *Hist. Crit. de Manichee*, tom i. p. 537. This is a fair specimen of the nature of the disputes which agitated the church and broke the ties of christian fellowship in this and the following centuries. There is scarcely any shade of difference in opinion with regard to the person of our Lord which has not been in turn upheld and rejected: and what have we gained by this zeal without knowledge?—the same questions are still agitated after a lapse of sixteen hundred years, and with no better success than before, with quite as much damage to christian charity and no greater hope of deciding the point effectually.

and were far more faulty in their definitions than their faith. There is hardly any argument of an unpractised disputer that may not be pushed *ad absurdum* by a clever opponent.

The disposition to forsake the simplicity of the gospel which had shown itself in endless disputes on abstruse points of doctrine, was apparent also, during this century, in the rites of the church. Handsome buildings were erected for the celebration of divine worship; vessels of gold and silver were employed in the service of the eucharist, to which an almost superstitious reverence was beginning to be paid; the use of incense was introduced, the sermons became more rhetorical, and the pomp of the church service much increased. A strange notion was also current with regard to evil dæmons which were thought to have power over unbaptized persons: hence there came to be an order of exorcists, who were charged to scare away the evil spirit before baptism was administered. Fasting and abstinence from every kind of pleasure were thought positively meritorious by many; and so undue an importance attached to ceremonies in general, that we may begin to date the corruption of the church from this period.

The evil seed was sown, and by the end of the next century had germinated so far that formal observances were beginning to take the place of genuine christianity; and corporeal austerities were more thought of than brotherly love.





CHAPTER VI.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CHRISTIANITY.

THE vigorous administration of the two emperors and their respective Cæsars, had in great measure restored tranquillity to the empire. Galerius had compelled the Persians to ratify a peace by which their king consented to accept his crown from the Romans; and the Barbarians had experienced several such crushing defeats that their boldness was cowed, at least, for a time. No persecution had been raised against the christians since the reign of Aurelianus, and thirty years of unmolested progress had sufficed to spread very widely a system which from its organization was peculiarly calculated to triumph over a less united opposition. Polytheism had nearly vanished from among the learned and the great: it was becoming vulgar:—Diocletianus himself,—who, though illiterate, was a great patron of learning,—

was married to a christian; had allowed his daughter to be educated in the same opinions; had filled up most of the offices about his person with christians, and received their bishops with distinguished honour: so that many suspected that he would himself embrace ere long the opinions which were become so popular among his people. Constantius Chlorus, whose just and merciful rule had won him the affection of all, if not actually baptized, had certainly renounced the superstitions of the state religion, and granted the fullest tolerance to his christian subjects; who, if not the majority in numbers, were so at least in riches and intelligence, as we may guess from the stately churches which were every where erected,* as well as from the complaints of the christian writers that the virtues of the gospel were choked by luxury and worldly pursuits. It is evident that they were no longer the meek, humble sect which they had been: they

* "Who can describe the numbers," says Eusebius, "who flocked to our houses of prayer? so that the old buildings being insufficient to contain them they were pulled down, and larger and more splendid ones built." —*Hist. Ecc. lib. viii. c. 1.*

felt their own consequence in the state; and it is hardly likely that at a conjuncture so apparently favourable, they should not have felt, and perhaps expressed a wish, that so large a body, comprising so much of the wealth and intelligence of the empire, should be able at last to give it a ruler.

The talents and popularity of Constantius, his noble birth, and his promising young son, who was already in great favour at the court of Diocletianus, seemed to point him out as the fit successor to that emperor; and it cannot be doubted that every christian in the empire would gladly have seen him in that position, and probably have aided very willingly in raising him to it. Maximinus Galerius, the other Cæsar, was a man of very different character and habits: he was a Dacian by birth, totally illiterate, and had been employed in his youth in the meanest occupations; but had won his way to power by military talent. As might be expected from such a training, he was addicted to the vices which too often stain the military life; and was by no means inclined to the stricter views of the christians: but it seems probable that Galerius, like many other emperors, re-

garded them more as a political than a religious party. He was ambitious; he aimed, as is evident from his subsequent actions, at the supreme power; and finding his rival Constantius already in favour with the one party, he naturally turned to the other or polytheistic party,—which still included, at least, a large portion of the populace and the army,—for assistance in the conflict which he meditated.*

The very nature of christianity was aggressive: it was quite evident that polytheism would not be tolerated if once that were in the ascendant, and there were still many whose livelihood depended on the ceremonial rites of the state religion. These classes looked with as much anxiety to Galerius, as he did to them for assistance; for he too, as well as Constantius, had a son. Diocletianus, no longer young, “indolent, timid, and surrounded every where by christians; averse from slaughter and bloodshed, and a lover of quiet,” was little to be depended on; yet, as he was also superstitious and credulous, hopes were

* V. MOSHEIM *de Rebus Christianorum*. Sæculum quartum.

entertained both by Galerius and his supporters that he might be moved by prodigies and omens to renew the Decian persecution; and by weakening the christian party, weaken also that of Constantius. The subsequent actions of Galerius authorise us in assuming thus much.

As a first step towards this, it was now notified at the court of Diocletianus that Apollo himself had announced by a voice, that the just men then living on the earth were opposed to him, and that therefore his oracles were less true than formerly.* The emperor, on hearing this, inquired of those about him who these just men were, whom Apollo thus accused? Some of the heathen priests were present; of course waiting to see the effect of the intelligence; and they immediately answered, that the persons thus denounced were the christians: whereupon the superstitious emperor being much incensed, decreed that their religion should no

* The emperor Constantinus himself relates this, with a very solemn asseveration of its truth,—in his circular letter to the provinces. He had heard it himself when a boy, at the court of Nicomedia.—V. EUSEB. *de Vit. Constantini*, lib. ii. c. 50, 51.

longer be tolerated: but soon after, moved by his wife, perhaps, or his christian friends, he revoked his order, and left them in tranquillity. Shortly after this he caused sacrifices to be made, and the Haruspices being called upon, as usual, to inspect the entrails, they declared that they saw none of the accustomed marks; and after repeated trials and failures, said that no doubt the presence of profane men was the obstacle to the completion of their business:—for most of the emperor's attendants and officers being christians, they of course were present with him at the sacrifices: upon which he was again much enraged, and gave orders that not only all those who were present, but who held employments in the palace, should themselves assist in the rites on pain of being compelled to it by stripes. But this short lived passion also passed away.

It was now evident that nothing would be effected against the paramount christian influence unless stronger measures were taken; and Galerius himself went to Nicomedia to confer with his father-in-law. They spent that winter together; but it was not till just before Easter, A.D. 303, that the christians

were astounded by an edict that their churches should be razed to the ground, their holy writings burned, and that such as persisted in the christian faith should be deprived of office, honours, and even freedom. This was shortly after followed by another, requiring all pastors and heads of the church to sacrifice: on refusal they were to be imprisoned, and if that failed, *any* measures were permitted.

When the decree was first posted, a nobleman of Nicomedia, with more warmth than prudence, seized on it and tore it in pieces in the very presence of the emperors: his rashness served the purpose of Galerius, and the christians who held office in the palace were at once called upon to sacrifice, and on refusal were put to death by tortures too horrible to recount. I have not space to enter into the history of this persecution, the longest and the severest to which the christians were ever exposed; * and I might add, the most impolitic on the part of their

* Those who wish to know more of this period, may consult EUSEB. *Hist. Ecc.* lib. 8, and other later ecclesiastical histories, where the details of this persecution will be found.

rulers; for the empire needed all its strength to resist the attacks of the barbarous nations pressing upon it from all sides; and it was not by confiscation, enslavement, and torture, that men's minds were likely to be conciliated, or the army filled with soldiers willing to devote their lives for its preservation.

The edict was sent to all parts of the empire with an exhortation to enforce it: but Constantius, though unable completely to resist its execution, so modified it, that in his own provinces, though some few churches were in part pulled down, the lives and fortunes of his christian subjects were protected; and the popularity which he gained by a conduct so different from that of his colleagues, prepared the way for the success of his son, and the mighty change consequent on his accession to the empire.

Galerius in the mean time pursued his plans of ambition; and taking advantage of the illness of Diocletianus, compelled both him and his colleague Maximianus, to resign the purple. He himself, and Constantius, now succeeded to the title of Augustus, and two new Cæsars were created, both of them

creatures of Galerius, to the exclusion of Constantinus, the popular and distinguished son of the new emperor Constantius: and not only was he excluded from the dignity which all had expected to see him invested with, but he was retained in a sort of honourable captivity in the dominions of Galerius; so as to be in some measure a hostage for his father's conduct, who, though ill, was unable to obtain the solace of his son's company. The young man, however, escaped by a stratagem; and the death of Constantius having taken place no very long time after, the soldiers at once acclaimed him emperor. He was too popular with the military to be put down by force of arms; and Galerius, though enraged at this failure in his schemes, at last was persuaded to send him the purple, not however, as Augustus, but as Cæsar.

Meanwhile the intolerable oppression exercised by Galerius and his creatures, goaded the people to revolt; Maxentius, the son of Maximianus, put himself at their head, and persuaded his father at the same time to resume the purple, and reign as his colleague. But this was only a change of tyranny, and all eyes were turned towards the young and

gallant Constantinus, whose temperate life, military talent, and just rule, gave every hope to the oppressed people that they might find in him a deliverer. Maxentius was probably aware of this ; and, as soon as by his oppression he had amassed sufficient sums to bear the expense, he began to prepare for war with the rival whom he dreaded.*

Constantinus, after some vain remonstrances, seeing that no other course remained, and that he must prepare to maintain his empire by force of arms, began his march for Italy ; determined to attack the tyrant in his own territory. It was a struggle of no ordinary danger, and it is not wonderful that he should contemplate its issue with some anxiety : he wished to implore Divine aid, but the conflicting religious opinions by which

* A circumstance occurred about this time which shows that the soldiers generally, if not actually christians, were, at any rate, very careless of the heathen superstitions. On the occasion of a fire in the temple of Fortune at Rome, a soldier uttered some raillery against the goddess, which the populace resenting, murdered him ; whereupon his comrades not at all concerned at the impiety he was charged with, and determined to revenge his death, rushed on the people sword in hand, and slew immense numbers in the tumult which ensued.

the empire was divided, left him in doubt even on this point; and he is said by his biographers to have addressed himself in earnest prayer to the Supreme Being, entreating Him to make Himself manifest to him in some way; so that he might worship Him acceptably. We are further told that soon after this, at mid-day, there appeared to him and to his whole army then on their march, a pillar of light above the sun in the form of a cross, with the inscription "In hoc vince."

There does not seem any reason to doubt this narrative as to the main facts, but it is not needful to suppose that there was anything in the appearance beyond the common course of nature. Parhelia of all shapes have been seen at times, and to a dazzled eye and an excited imagination, already expecting a prodigy in answer to earnest prayer, the inscription might seem nearly as real as the phenomenon itself, which by unscientific observers must have been regarded as portentous.* The horrible death of Galerius,—

* The whole transaction was related to Eusebius who records it, by Constantinus himself, who confirmed its truth by a solemn oath. It explains subsequent events which it would be difficult otherwise to account for.

which was by the christians universally attributed to Divine vengeance, and which he himself viewed in that light,—for he revoked the edict against them and asked their prayers;—could hardly have failed to make a strong impression on the young emperor. His father has prospered in all his undertakings; his provinces were rich and flourishing, his army well disciplined, his popularity unbounded; and he alone had favoured the christian cause, and perhaps worshipped in secret the christian's God. Doubtless there were many christians in his army, and by them any appearance bearing a form at all resembling a cross of light in the heavens, would be acclaimed as an undoubted sign of victory in the approaching conflict: for though Constantinus had not yet professed that faith, it was the favour which he and his father had shown to the christian cause which had embroiled him with the other rulers of the empire; and his triumph would be the triumph of Christ. At that time the phenomenon was regarded as purely miraculous, but let us imagine, that the Creator of all things when he first imposed laws on the physical world had so ordered them that

second causes should produce at this moment the sign which answered the earnest prayer of a human spirit seeking the truth, and we have a far greater proof of the overruling power of the Deity than if we suppose, with the less scientific believers of those days, that the Almighty was at every moment suspending his own laws in order to give evidence of his existence, best witnessed by their constancy. If the earth rocked in the throes of an earthquake at the Crucifixion, we have no need to look for a special interference to cause it: but it did occur at that moment; and but for the predisposition of causes acting from the very foundation of the world, it would not have so occurred: we must then equally confess that it was ordered by the LORD OF NATURE; but the scientific faith is the nobler of the two, inasmuch as there is more of sublimity in supposing physical events pursuing their sure course, so as to curb and regulate the capricious will of man, ever varying from day to day; than in imagining the Deity, like a finite being, perpetually changing his measures to meet the emergency of the moment.

The following night the heavenly sign was

explained by a dream—a very natural consequence—in which the emperor imagined that he saw Christ addressing him, and commanding him to make a standard in the form he had seen in the sky, and promising that under that standard he should conquer. Hereupon he not only gave orders for the making such a standard, but he sent for persons capable of instructing him in the christian faith, that he might render acceptable homage to the God who had promised him the victory which he soon after achieved.* Maxentius was slain, and he entered Rome in triumph amid the acclamations of all classes.

Throughout all the provinces which he had won, Constantinus now reversed the edict against the christians; restored to liberty all such as had been imprisoned or enslaved; and gave them back their confiscated estates. An act of good policy, for they were a numerous, powerful, well organized party, wholly de-

* Eusebius tells us that he set up in the most conspicuous part of the city his own statue bearing the banner of the cross in his hand, with the following inscription below it: "*Hoc salutari signo vero fortitudinis indicio, civitatem vestram tyrannidis iugo liberavi; et S. P. Q. R. in libertatem vindicans, pristinae amplitudini et splendori restitui.*"

voted to his interests. So powerful indeed, that it has been questioned by some whether the emperor's conversion had any other than a political object. This may have been to a certain degree true; but probably was not wholly so: in all great changes in the government and polity of nations, the man who fulfils the wish of the age is himself strongly impressed with the general feeling. He may find in the course he takes the road to greatness, for he who successfully carries out the great thought of his time must have been able to guide by his talent the enthusiasm which animates his followers, as well as to have discreetly controlled it in himself; and finally, success may corrupt; but the first steps in a desperate contest are usually taken with less of calculation than the later ones: and the generous feelings which may afterwards be counterfeited are genuine in the first instance.

It is difficult to transplant ourselves so completely into a long past age as to *feel* with the men of that time: it can never be done but by reading contemporary writers, and entering with them into their passions and their prejudices. Let us pause for a moment and

look thus at the state of men's minds at the accession of Constantinus.

Three hundred years had elapsed since the birth of Christ, and that period had been marked by a gradual decay of literature and art. The misgovernment of the first emperors, and the constant wars in which the later ones had been engaged, had made the army the preponderating power in the state, and this army, frequently recruited from the hardier nations of more northern climates, at last gave rulers to the empire, who carried with them to their high office the rude customs and superstitions of their early years, and of the camp which had been their second home. Slaves from all nations, freedmen, and the descendants of freedmen, formed the bulk of the population of Rome proper ; and thus the darkest ignorance was gradually taking possession of the land. What there was of luxury was gross sensuality ; and to gratify this, such oppression was exercised, that the people were wearied and hopeless : the state religion offered nothing on which the mind could rest for comfort or support ; it was scoffed at or disregarded by the great, who professed that it was only good for the common

people ; the common people liked it for its shows and its sacrifices ; but when darker hours came, and pestilence and misery made men seek for something more stable, it had nothing to offer. It was easy to excite a superstitious and ignorant populace to murderous excesses by suggesting that some offended divinity had been the cause of the evils they were suffering under, but the desolate heart was not comforted, and the evils of the present, and the dread of the future, found no alleviation.

Side by side with this comfortless system another had grown up, its reverse in all respects : offering the best fruits of the highest philosophy in precepts comprehensible to the meanest intellect : the occasional persecutions with which its professors had been visited, had placed the excellence of a system which could command such devoted adherents in the strongest light, and the numbers who perished were compensated tenfold by the admiring converts which they won—even persecution had its benefits, for it purged the church from formal professors, and left only those who were in earnest, and who, in the midst of some human faults incident to the situation

in which they were placed, showed that they were in earnest by their fearless martyrdom : the thing of all others likely to win most upon a warrior people, daily becoming more illiterate, and less able to appreciate the *philosophy* of christianity. Even the fierce discussions of abstract points of doctrine amongst its heads, the synods of bishops, the excommunication of those who had lapsed into idolatry, the exclusion of strangers from the christian mysteries, and the now increased number of imposing ceremonies with which the initiation into the christian faith was accompanied, impressed the illiterate heathens with a degree of blind awe which occasionally broke into open hatred, but the contempt with which the humble sect had at first been viewed had long ago been changed into apprehension. The miraculous powers claimed by the christians for their first teachers—and even still maintained with all the earnestness of men who believed that the power which a strong belief exercised over the imagination was altogether supernatural ;—led to a notion among the heathens that christianity was a new and more potent form of magic. It was nothing surprising to a polytheist to hear of another

God more powerful than any yet worshipped, and many professed the religion of Christ at this later period who mixed it up strangely with their previous habits.* Even among the christians, there was more of superstition in their faith than formerly : it was fiercer, more enthusiastic ; and abstract doctrines were insisted on with a pertinacity of controversy which greatly lessened christian charity. The sterner parts of morality with few exceptions were both taught and practised : but the milder virtues of christianity were falling into disuse : the ambition of power crept in, and thus fitted them to assume the character of an active political party. The collision between this active, well organized body, and the remaining adherents of the ancient state religion, was every day becoming more imminent : for two parties so nearly balanced, one of which made no secret of its intention to extirpate the other, not indeed by force but

* At a somewhat later period a certain Magnentius, a so-called Christian, having rebelled and assumed the purple, when he found himself hard pressed by the troops of Constantius, the son of Constantinus, had recourse to the magical arts of the heathen, and sacrificing a virgin, made his men drink of her blood, mixed with wine, in order to assure success.

proselytism, could not long exist together in the same empire. Political circumstances brought on the contest a little sooner than it might otherwise have occurred ; but even if the edict of Diocletianus had never been published, or Constantinus never been born, the event could not have been long delayed. It is seldom that *the man* is wanting when *the hour* has arrived : and Constantinus in his semi-barbarism and his semi-christianity, was precisely the man of his age : his military skill, though of the highest order, had been equalled by others ; but his enlarged views, his temperate youth, unstained by any of the vices which degraded his contemporaries, his just appreciation of the power of the christian faith in the re-organization of society, were in advance of his time ; and these give him a claim to be considered as one of those extraordinary men whom troubled times bring forth to guide the movement ; and who, even though not free from great faults, are remembered with gratitude by those who enjoy the benefits of their sagacity.

Maximinus, the nephew of Galerius, had yielded but an unwilling obedience to his uncle's last edict : and after his death, rallied

round himself the whole of the polytheistic party, and renewed in his own part of the empire the persecution which he had so unwillingly suspended. Licinius, a man also of mean birth and debauched habits, who had received the purple from Galerius shortly before his death, shared with him the empire of the east, and the restless ambition of the two soon armed the one against the other. Licinius seeing his rival already in favour with the party of the old system strengthened himself by an alliance with Constantinus, whose sister he received in marriage; and he himself professed his readiness to receive instruction in the christian faith. Maximinus having begun hostilities by seizing on some of the provinces of his rival, a battle ensued, marked by one of those circumstances which can only occur when men's minds are in a high state of excitement. Licinius, we are told by a contemporary writer,* dreamed the night before the battle, that a prayer to the true God was divinely dictated to him, the use of which should secure him the victory. He remembered, and caused copies of this

* Lactantius.

prayer to be distributed to the army in the morning, and when about to engage, the opposing forces were astonished by seeing the officers and men of Licinius lay aside shield and helmet, and raising their hands to heaven, implore the blessing of heaven on their cause. It is not wonderful that the battle was soon decided in favour of Licinius. The soldier who enters the field with a prayer, may remain there a corpse, but will not quit it a fugitive.

The edict in favour of the christians published jointly by Constantinus and Licinius was now enforced throughout the empire: but the defeated party still miscalculated its own strength, and on occasion of some dissension between the two emperors, probably only caught at as a pretext for bringing the matter again to the decision of arms, Licinius suddenly threw off the mask, rallied round him the remains of the conservative party of old Rome,—if I may be allowed the use of a modern term on this occasion;—began a fresh persecution of the christians, and prepared for war.

The singular mixture of religious feeling and policy in the whole of the wars of this

period give them a peculiar character: the christian party was that of the movement: it aimed at a complete reconstruction of the social fabric. Constantinus had a mind large enough to conceive and execute a change of which he saw the importance, and he threw himself without reserve into the ranks of this powerful and well organized body: yet neither of the emperors, whilst thus embodying, each in his own person, a great political party, was free from the superstitious feeling of his followers. We are told by Eusebius, who professes to have enquired carefully into the truth of the fact, which could then be easily ascertained, that Licinius before engaging, performed with his chief officers all the ceremonies thought most efficacious in winning the favour of the old gods of Rome; and having done so, made an address to his army * on the occasion, telling them that the issue of the battle should show them which was indeed the Deity to be worshipped: for if Constantinus, with a smaller force, should by the aid of his strange

* Licinius had purged his army of all christians by requiring his soldiers to sacrifice. He thus lost numbers of his best men.

God, obtain the victory, then indeed the God who could thus give success, deserved their homage: if, on the contrary, the gods of Rome should prevail, as he believed they would; then it would be their business to destroy Constantinus and his wicked adherents.

The two armies thus met to put the power of their respective deities to the proof: the christians confident in the Divine aid, and without fear of a death which they considered as a glorious martyrdom: the heathens on the other side, doubtful of their cause;—for the cruelties lately perpetrated on the unoffending christian women, youths, and old men, had disgusted all the well-disposed;—and already half vanquished by their fear of what they considered as the magical standard of the cross, which, with its chosen guard of fifty men, glittered among the opposite ranks.*

* It was of gold and precious stones, imitating as far as possible the brilliant appearance in the sky which had given rise to its construction. The dread which this standard inspired was such, that wherever it was sent forward, the enemy immediately gave way: and Licinius at a subsequent period forbade his men either to fight against, or even look at it; saying it had a certain virtue in it which was always fatal to its opponents. Constantinus himself related to Eusebius, that if any one

The victory was not long doubtful; and a second battle left so little hope of success in the struggle, that Licinius was glad to accept the mercy of the conqueror; who, for the sake of his sister, suffered him still to reign. It is difficult to gather from contemporary writers what was the proximate cause of the fresh war which ensued between the two emperors, A.D. 322. Whatever the pretext, there is little doubt that the real contest was between the two great religious and political parties. The christians so cruelly and unjustly treated under the latter heathen sovereigns, were not likely to give up their advantage now that they had a man at their head capable of giving them the final predominance: it would have been almost a suicidal folly had they done so. Licinius continued his enmity to the professors of that faith, and we can hardly suppose that the bishops, who were so well received at the

of the standard-bearers fled from his post, he was invariably slain by an arrow; but that those who valiantly bore it, always escaped unhurt; an observation which shows not only the superstitious awe with which it was regarded by the heathens, but marks also the state of the emperor's own mind, for he evidently considered this as owing to a supernatural interference.

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court of Constantinus, failed to use their favour in behalf of their brethren. The cause was once more put to the arbitrement of arms, and the result of the war left Constantinus sole emperor, and christianity the established religion of the whole empire: for though the heathens were still to a certain degree allowed the exercise of their religious rites, they were very much curbed by successive edicts, and the public sacrifices to the deities of old Rome wholly abolished. It is probably in these edicts which took away the maintenance of those who had lived on the superstitions of the people, that we shall find the true cause of the last war with Licinius. This emperor was the last hope of the heathen party, he was already advanced in years, and his vicious propensities made him a ready tool in their hands: no time therefore was to be lost in making use of him.

From the time that the banner of the cross had first led his troops to victory, the warrior proselyte paid back in support to the christian cause the support which he had himself received, as well from the valour of his christian soldiers as from the all-powerful intervention of the christians' God, of which

he appears to have entertained no doubt ; and edict upon edict followed in quick succession, first staying persecution, then affording complete toleration, and finally such a degree of favour as amounted to a recognition of the christian faith as that of the state. The laws of the better emperors against informers were re-enacted immediately after the defeat and death of Maxentius : by a law dated two years later, the clergy were exempted from all civil employments, in order that they might attend more completely to the instruction of the people : four years later yet, the Haruspices were forbidden to enter private houses ; and in this case persons were permitted to give informations. It would appear that these private sacrifices were a mode of exciting the people to rebellion ; for the edict adds, that even when not celebrated in private houses, those on whose behalf the sacrifices were made should send the answer of the Haruspices to the emperor's secretary. Two years more, and the general observance of Sunday by ceasing from work on that day, was enjoined by edict ; and after the final defeat of Licinius, the heathen temples were ordered to be shut up, and the lands and reve-

nues belonging to them were appropriated to pious uses.

But the triumph of Constantinus and of christianity had a further effect which has been more and more felt ever since. The rites of polytheism were intended to honour so-called deities, who according to the mythological tales which amused the common people were stained with the worst vices of depraved men. The consequence of this was that there was pollution in even the most solemn acts of religious worship: these pollutions were now forbidden; and whatever might be the actual conduct of individuals, the pattern of perfect virtue and purity was held up for imitation. In the laws, henceforward, the christian standard of morality was recognised, and even if the prejudices and ill habits of the time made men slow to adopt that standard as their own measure, still the state had acknowledged a Maker who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. Vice might be prevalent, but it was no longer licensed by the established religion or the laws of the empire.

Edicts were now published enforcing the better administration of justice: forbidding

any unnecessary harshness even in the case of those imprisoned for crimes, and especially requiring that the payment of the taxes should not be enforced by scourging or any other corporal infliction ; a mild imprisonment was all that was in this case permitted. The combats of gladiators, which seem to have been renewed after the death of Hadrianus, were finally prohibited,* and condemned criminals, instead of being cast to wild beasts, were sent to the mines.

The persecution of the christians which Galerius and the other rivals of Constantinus had carried on with such relentless severity, had silenced rather than allayed the dissensions in the church, which had been so violent that Eusebius, in writing of his own times, considers that persecution as a just judgment of God on his unworthy servants, who had so far forgotten christian charity as to require the tie of a common danger to unite them. It had for a time this effect, the christian cause once more became a reality, and when Con-

* The practice, nevertheless, was renewed, and was not wholly discontinued till the fall of the western empire. The last decree against it was made by Honorius.

stantinus required to be instructed in the faith, he found men capable of presenting to their imperial convert the pure philosophy of the gospel. The circular letter addressed by him to the eastern provinces was that of a wise sovereign no less than a sincere christian ; and it would have been well for the world had this policy never been deviated from. In that rescript he professes his own faith in the God who had so wonderfully given him the victory over his foes, but leaves it to his subjects to follow the religion which seems to them best : and requests that they will live in peace together, and if they cannot convince one another by reason, forbids them to attempt it by other means. A wise and christian law !

Scarcely was the church delivered from persecution when the dissensions which had been silenced for a time broke forth with double violence. That in the church of Africa arose from a double election to the see of Carthage. The decree of Diocletianus required the keepers of the holy books to deliver them up to the emperor's officers, under heavy penalties in case of refusal : the doing so was however held to be so heinous a sin by the more scrupulous christians, that a peculiar name of

dishonour was attached to those guilty of it, and the "*Traditores*,"—so they were called, were considered thenceforth unfit for the priestly office. The bishop of Carthage was accused of being a *Traditor*; another election was made, and Donatus quickly succeeding the first schismatic bishop, the sect took its name from him, and, under the title of Donatists, created a lasting breach in the unity of the church; for they considered the ordination by the hands of a traditor as invalid; therefore none who derived their commission from those thus ordained or consecrated, were truly either priests or bishops, in their eyes.

The emperor's first care was to compose this quarrel by calling a synod of bishops to decide the matter; but fanaticism never yet allowed of any decision but its own; the emperor's order might establish the bishop in his see, but could not compel the seceders to return to his flock;—and they remained obstinate. Unfortunately for all succeeding times, the rational doctrines of Christ and his first followers had suffered much during the heat of persecution; and those who had endured so much for their faith, hardened in their

feelings and stiffened in their opinions by the tyranny of previous emperors, now refused to abate one jot of even an unimportant doctrine for the sake of that brotherly love which their Divine Teacher had inculcated as the first and most important of a christian's duties. Still less could they condescend to think of the peace of the empire, or attend to the wise counsels of a sovereign disposed to favour them, as much perhaps, because it was a religion of peace and love, which ought to have healed all wounds, as because he himself had fully imbibed its precepts. Indeed at the ripe age of thirty-eight, for he was that age when he fought and triumphed over Maxentius, a man deeply engaged in warlike toils and political cares, was not likely to become a very learned theologian, and we can but wonder at the grasp of intellect which while it rendered him decidedly the ablest prince and most successful general of his day, enabled him to seize on the salient points of the christian system, and enforce them with the earnest eloquence of a preacher of the first century.*

* The personal character of Constantinus has been handed down to us through the partial accounts of two parties equally interested in lauding or slandering him :

The next serious dissension which was brought under the eyes of the emperor was in the church of Alexandria. The bishop Alexander having moved some questions among his clergy relating to the Divine nature, Areius, a presbyter of that church, considering that the bishop's views savoured of Sabel-

we shall read it better in the great page of human nature. His person was fine, his talents and promptitude made him the master rather than the slave of circumstances:—yet with these advantages, so ruinous to many, his life was temperate and chaste: the philosophy of christianity was, therefore, doubtless the choice of his heart. But he who had been so great while his fortunes were yet in the balance, was not proof against prosperity, and the adulation which accompanies it: the christian bishops, by whom he was surrounded, insisted so much on his favour before God, who had made him the instrument of restoring his church, that the humbler virtues of the christian life were overlooked—the despotic monarch grew hasty in his decisions when none opposed him, and the bishops about the court were but too happy to maintain an influence which they thought beneficial to the interests of true religion by a lavishness of praise, which though not insincere, was dangerous to him whom they thus exalted. The wisest and the best have not unfrequently been flattered out of both wisdom and goodness. Still, amid all his faults, Constantinus was unquestionably the greatest man of his time, and when we compare him with his contemporaries we can hardly forbear to wonder,—not that he was so little,—but that he was so much a christian as he was.

lianism, broached a different view of the subject, which Alexander in his turn condemned, and wrote a circular letter to the churches announcing what he had done; this had the usual effect of involving others in a violent partisanship upon points of abstract doctrine which none either did, or ever could thoroughly comprehend, and upon which, for this very reason, they were all the more violent; since no words could be found to make the meaning of either thoroughly clear. Constantinus was much concerned at this new dispute, when the union of all was so much needed to heal the wounds of long civil war, and endeavoured by all the means in his power to put an end to it. With this view he addressed a letter to the two leaders, so wise in its tenour that it might well have formed a rule for all future controversy. He tells the bishop that it was not good to move questions on such subjects: and he tells Areius that it was not good to answer them publicly; for however a quick wit might like to exercise itself in arguing curious and abstract questions, it was not likely that he could find an auditory capable of following him; and thus mistakes would arise, faith be shaken,

and christian brotherhood impaired. "It is desirable," says he, "that we, the servants of one God, should agree together in the religion we profess, and not strive together about some unnecessary points, to the disturbance of the universal peace.—These are vulgar, childish wranglings, unbefitting the character of wise men, or the gravity of the priesthood."—But as this letter, and his own entreaty that he might be allowed to see his empire enjoying the peace it so much needed, had no effect, he at last convoked a general council of bishops to decide the point fully, so that the church might be at rest. This council met at Nikæa in Bithynia, A.D. 325, and was the first of those general councils which rather fostered than allayed the dissensions of the christian community. Yet the expedient was one that would have naturally occurred to a monarch and a general: for could he doubt that what had been resolved on in a council of the leaders, would be obeyed by the inferiors, in so well disciplined a body as the christian church presented to his first view?—Yet he had miscalculated the sturdy spirit of men whose passions had been heated, and whose courage had been tested by so many years of

unjust suffering,* and the council, notwithstanding his endeavours to promote peace, was a stormy one. Finally, however, the doctrine of Areius was condemned, and a creed agreed on which should decide the points at issue with regard to the Divine Trinity. Areius and a few of his adherents, were deposed and exiled by the emperor, who was probably excited in some degree by the passionate pleadings held in his presence: but afterwards returning to that lenient toleration which seems to have been the choice of his own mind, he recalled the exiles, though to the last he professed his adherence to the faith as settled by the council of Nikæa. He died A.D. 337, in his sixty-fourth year, and left the empire in possession of his descendants, who had been carefully educated in the christian faith: but who, brought up amid the flatteries and luxuries of a magnificent court, were but unworthy successors to the greatest prince of his age.

* There was hardly a bishop then present who did not carry on his person indelible marks of the cruelties to which he had been subjected.



CHAPTER VII.

CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE AS ESTABLISHED AT THE FIRST COUNCIL.

IT was in an evil hour that the christian church departed from the modest discretion of the first century, and began to moot questions on the nature of the Divine Essence, which must necessarily be beyond the reach of human definitions. Far wiser was Justinus the martyr, who, when mentioning in his Apology the form of baptism, says, "we pronounce over the convert the name of God, and that only; for he who should presume to say more than that respecting that ineffable name, is far gone in incurable madness." I have said before that the disputes in the church, and the sects which arose in consequence, were mainly attributable to the difficulty found by untrained minds in conceiving an abstract idea. A god having neither form nor parts; passionless, invisible, yet present

everywhere, and directing all; is an inconceivable notion to minds wont to think only of present objects: and in the endeavour to shadow forth his belief in some comprehensible form, the christian of ordinary education generally tinctures it insensibly with earthly ideas, and gives to his God something of the feelings and the individuality of man.

It was out of this difficulty that the heresy of Areius arose. He could not comprehend the possibility of an eternal generation; and dissatisfied with the safe and general explanation given by the first fathers of the church, that God, being essentially rational, must have reason, called *Logos* by the Greeks,—in himself eternally, as a part of his self-existing being; he sought a closer definition, and insisted that the Son of God, or *Logos*, was an individual being, generated before all things, but having a beginning, and capable of a separate will: thus supposing a kind of human relationship between Father and Son, and as it were putting the Godhead in commission, by allowing that its functions, and not its essential being, formed the Deity.*

* This notion is not wholly lost even in modern times.

It would have been better had the bishop suffered this folly to cure itself, as men's minds became more susceptible of the truth; for Areius was a man of irreproachable life, and the error of his faith did not taint his practice: but once spread abroad, the doctrine was so much better suited to the apprehension of the vulgar than that which had hitherto been

I remember to have heard the Godhead likened to the imperial dignity, when one Augustus and two Cæsars shared it between them! and notwithstanding St. Paul's care to prevent any such notion by specifying that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to HIMSELF," the wrath of the Father and the mediation of the Son are often talked of in terms which are quite incompatible with the unity of the Deity which we profess to acknowledge. "Do not imagine," said a clergyman a few years ago, in a sermon heard by the writer, "do not imagine that you owe your redemption to the compassion of the Son alone; for the Father was consulted and consenting to it."—What would any of the Nicene Fathers have said to such decided Areianism? Yet none of the hearers seemed aware that they had been listening to an anathematized heresy: still less did the preacher himself know it.

With regard to the first mentioned idea, Dionysius, Bishop of Rome in the third century, thus writes, "for the mad doctrine that would divide the monarchy (i. e. of God) into three authorities or magistrates, is altogether the teaching of the devil, and not of the true disciples of Christ." See *ATHAN. Ep. de Decret. Nic. Syn.* p. 182, Oper. Omnia.

embraced in the church, that it was taken up with avidity, and it required all the authority of the emperor in person to induce anything like unanimity in the decision of the council on a point of such great, and yet such small import : for though unworthy notions of the Deity have universally sunk the moral tone of the people professing them : there is no sin in leaving questions such as these unanswered ; and we do well to judge of those who on abstract points may seem to us in error, by the rule our Saviour himself has given. " By their fruits ye shall know them."

After considerable difficulty in finding terms for so stupendous a definition, it was agreed that the profession of faith to be made thenceforth should acknowledge that the Son was *ὁμοουσιος*, namely, of *the same* being or nature as the Father, the Arians on their part refusing this definition, and insisting that he was *ὁμοιουσιος*, namely, of *a like* being or nature : and these two terms became the watch-words of party, and as we shall see at a later period, filled the empire with bloodshed and violence.

At the Council of Nikæa a young deacon of Alexandria, by name Athanasius, distinguished

himself by the acuteness of his intellect: and in a very short time afterwards, on the death of Alexander, he was raised to the episcopal chair. His strenuous opposition to the Areian doctrines made him obnoxious to party rage, and he was in turn exiled or recalled to his bishopric as the one or the other doctrine prevailed. The ability shown both in his conduct and his writings made him the fit champion of the faith; and the doctrines he avouches may be considered as those both of the council, and of the general or Catholic Church at that time. I shall therefore quote from his writings enough to make these points as clear as the nature of the questions will permit; for his language is unusually perspicuous, and his subject well arranged. He begins with the state of man at his first creation.

“In the beginning evil was not, neither does it now exist at all in those who are holy: but men at last imagined it for themselves. . . . For the Creator and King of all things, who is infinitely beyond human conception in excellence, through his own word and wisdom,*

* I must here once for all observe that the Greek

our Saviour Jesus Christ, made the human race in his own image, the fit beholders and studiers of nature; and by the similitude to himself prepared them for what he gave, namely the thought and knowledge of his own eternity; so that by preserving this resemblance in themselves they might never turn their imagination away from God, . . . but having in them the power of the Paternal Wisdom—(Logos)—they should delight in, and assimilate themselves to the Divinity, and live a happy and immortal life, suffering from no obstacle to the completeness of divine knowledge, and contemplating the God-wisdom, which is the image of the Father, in whose image they were made. . . . For when the mind of man does not assimilate itself to the body, and allows none of its passions and desires to mix intimately in its nature, but continues altogether to aspire to

term *Logos* signifies both a word, an argument, and the reasoning faculty of the mind : and that this double sense is adopted by the Greek fathers to express that wisdom and the word or command of God are synonymous : the Logos of God being as completely a part of himself as the rational faculty of man is a part of the human being, whether silently directing his actions or made manifest in speech.

what is above, as it was made to do at first; then the senses, and all that is human, aspiring upwards, and seeing Wisdom, see in it the Father of Wisdom, and the whole, delighted with the contemplation, renews itself by the desire to become such."

"Thus the Creator formed the human race, and willed it to remain in this state: but men, despising these better things, and taking no pains to understand them, sought for themselves what was nearer. Now the body and its senses were nearer; and they turned their minds away from intellectual things, and began to think about themselves only: and thus having perception merely of the body and its senses; they were deceived in their views even of their own nature, and fell into slavery to their own desires . . . and this we may see by Holy Scripture to have been the case with the first man . . . and thus having turned away from intellectual contemplations, they misused all the faculties of the body one after another . . ."* He then likens those who accuse God of making evil, to persons who when the sun is shining shut their eyes,

* ATHANASIUS, *Oratio cont. Gentes*, p. 4. Edit. Benedict.

and wander in darkness, falling, and running into danger because they *will not* see : the sun of the soul's eyes being God, and error being scarcely possible while we walk in that light.

He thus describes the Divine Logos or Word. "... knowing the Word of God we necessarily know the Father God from whom it first proceeds, and of whom it is said to be the interpreter and the messenger. And this may be understood by what passes in ourselves: for if in the word proceeding from man we believe the mind to be the fountain, and, having taken into consideration the spoken word, seem to see the mind in its cogitation; how much more, when contemplating the power of the Word, do we comprehend that of its all-good Father; as the Saviour himself says, 'He who hath seen me, hath seen my Father.'*.... Therefore as any one, should he wish to see God who is by nature invisible, may know and perceive him through his works, so he who is not able by his own intelligence to see Christ, may perceive him by the works done by him in the body and

* ATHANASIUS, *Oratio cont. Gentes*, p. 35. Edit. Benedict.

see whether those are the works of man or of God.* It,—the Logos, being by nature invisible, appears by its works, and thus shows itself to be the Word of the Father, and the ruler and king of all things. Neither was it enclosed in the body so that it was not at the same time everywhere else, neither did it animate that body so as to leave the rest of the world without energy and intelligence; and, which appears paradoxical, being the Word, or Wisdom, it was not united to any one, but rather united all in itself; and being *in* the whole creation, is yet by nature exterior to it: for it is *in* every thing by its power, arranging all, and giving life to all at the same time by its simple intelligence—comprehending all, and being comprehended by none,—and having its complete existence in the Father alone For the soul of man looks at things exterior to itself by its cogitations, but is not able to act on any thing exterior to, or at a distance from its body by its own energy but not so was the Word, or Wisdom of God in man; for it was not linked to the body, but rather ruled it; so

* ATHAN. *De Incarnat. Verbi Dei*, p. 74.

that it was *in* that, and *in* all other things, and yet was exterior to every thing, resting in the Father alone.”* He then proceeds to say, that when it is said of Christ that he was born, ate, drank, &c. it is to be understood of the human body, not of the Lord of all ; and that these things are mentioned only to show that it was a real man and not a mere apparition. “The corruptible,” he continues, “could not be changed into incorruptible but by the Saviour, who in the beginning made all things from nothing; and men could not be restored to the image in which they were formed but by the image of the Father . . . and since he was to pay the debt of all, for all owed the debt of death, and this was especially the object of his coming, he, after showing his divinity by his works, made the sacrifice for all by giving up his own temple to death, in order that he might make all free from the ancient transgression : for he showed himself greater than death, and in the first instance made his own body the proof of a resurrection to incorruption . . . and for this

* ATHAN. *De Incarnat. Verbi Dei*, p. 49.

purpose the Logos, which was itself not capable of death, being by nature immortal, took a body which was capable of death that it might suffer for all, and through its taking possession of it, make vain the power of death. . . . But why, some one may say, if it was necessary that he should die for all . . . did he not put off the body honourably, instead of enduring the shame of crucifixion? But if he had died, after the manner of men, in his bed, he would have been thought to have suffered from the common weakness of nature, and to have been nothing more than other men . . . or if without disease or any pain, he had laid down and hidden the body in some corner, in a desert, or in his own home, and after this had suddenly appeared, and said that he had risen from the dead, he would have seemed to all to have been uttering some fabulous tale.* . . ."

Lactantius, who appears to have written before the Areian controversy began, expresses himself nearly in the same terms, though with less precision: "When there was no longer any justice on the earth," says he,

* ATHAN. *De Incarnat. Verbi Dei*, p. 51.

“God sent a teacher to be, as it were, a living law; . . . that a true and holy worship might be spread over the whole earth by his words and example. . . . For he had a spiritual Father, even God, . . . he was therefore both God and man, or rather he was placed between God and man; (hence he is called *μεσσητης** by the Greeks), in order that he might lead man to God; that is, to immortality. . . . For man consists of flesh and spirit, and the spirit ought, by good works, to merit the gift of eternal life: but the flesh, because it is earthly and therefore mortal, drags down the spirit that is joined to it, and leads it away from immortality to death. A spirit, therefore, having no experience of the flesh could not guide man to immortality, . . . and for this cause a mediator came; that is, God in the flesh, to enable the flesh to follow him, and rescue man from death whose dominion is in the flesh. Thus he clothed himself in flesh, that, having vanquished its desires, he might teach that sin was not a necessity, but

* Namely, *one who stands between*. This word is translated *mediator* in our bibles, and as the word in English has a somewhat different signification, it may mislead the unlearned reader.

altogether voluntary and wilful For God, when he had resolved to deliver man, sent upon earth an Instructor in virtue, who, by his salutary precepts, might form men to innocence; and by perceivable actions, show the power of just principles. He, therefore, being clothed in a body like the men whom he came to teach, furnished at once an example of, and an incitement to virtue As it was desirable that he should give a specimen of every kind of right doing, and afford an example to man of the patient suffering and contempt of death, by which virtue might be perfected and consummated he suffered, and did not shrink even from death, in order that man, with him for his leader, might triumph over death and its terrors But why the Father of all allowed him to suffer that particular sort of death, I will explain. For some one may say, 'If he was God and chose to die, why did he not choose some respectable kind of death? Why, of all things the cross? Why that infamous punishment, which is a disgrace to a free man, even though he should be a malefactor?' I answer, that he bore what the humblest and lowest classes are subject to, in order that he might en-

courage and afford the hope of salvation to all; and that there might be none whatever who should be unable to imitate him.”*

With regard to the Trinity in the Divine nature, Athanasius thus speaks, “Neither is it to be supposed that because the Father is said to have given all to the Son, therefore he is not himself over all; for this would be clearly dividing off the only begotten of God, (who is by nature indivisible) as far as insane words can do so: for these impious persons do not consider that light cannot be divided from the sun to which it belongs by nature:—for we use those things at hand to express our meaning, although it be bold to attempt to explain a nature beyond our comprehension. As therefore the light of the sun which enlightens all things, could not shine without the sun: so piety leads us to know that the Divine nature of the Logos is united to the Father.”†

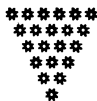
* LACT. lib. iv. c. 25, 26.

† ATHAN. in illud Omnia in mihi tradita sunt, p. 84. Elsewhere he quotes the expressed opinion of Dionysius, the martyred bishop of Alexandria, as follows: “There never was a time when God was not Father, and it therefore follows that Christ was eternal, being word and

This first council having been called to decide the question which Areius had raised regarding the faith; and also a far less important one regarding the time of observing Easter; after making some regulations respecting ecclesiastical discipline, separated;

wisdom and power. The light being eternal its splendour must be so also we will take an example of it. Where the sun shines is light and day,—therefore if the sun was present perpetually, light and day would be so also and God being perpetual light with neither beginning nor end, gives forth perpetually his uncreated splendour Therefore if the Father be eternal, so also is the Son; Light derived from Light; therefore there being an eternal Parent, there is also an eternal Son; both are, and both are eternally God being the Light, and the Son being its splendour, and the Spirit being also God may be likened to the breath, . . for the breath of God is his power.” The metaphor is intelligible enough, but it would have been more rhetorically true had the Spirit been likened to the secret chemical influence of the sun’s rays. Had Dionysius lived in these days, he would probably have so expressed himself. Elsewhere the same Dionysius likens the Parent Deity to the spring—the Son to the river flowing from it—we may add, perhaps the Holy Spirit, as the exhalations which fall in showers and fertilize the earth, returning then to feed the parent spring by filtration through the soil.—See ATHAN. *Ep. de Sententia Dionysii*. The opinions which I have quoted from Athanasius will be found equally in all preceding writers of the orthodox church where they have been called on to treat of these points.

and the Emperor took on himself to enforce its decrees by making them a part of the imperial and civil law. He was probably hardly aware that he thus laid the foundation for persecutions as virulent and as unjust as those which the early christians had suffered: for though he was himself so far despotic by his post and his disposition, that he could well abrogate or suspend his own laws, as he did by the recall of Areius and his friends after two years of exile; yet when weaker princes had to deal with an *imperium in imperio* like that of the christian hierarchy, supported as it was by public opinion, the law of Constantinus which converted spiritual offences into political crimes, gave a dangerous power to an intolerant faction, which was afterwards used without mercy as either side prevailed.



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